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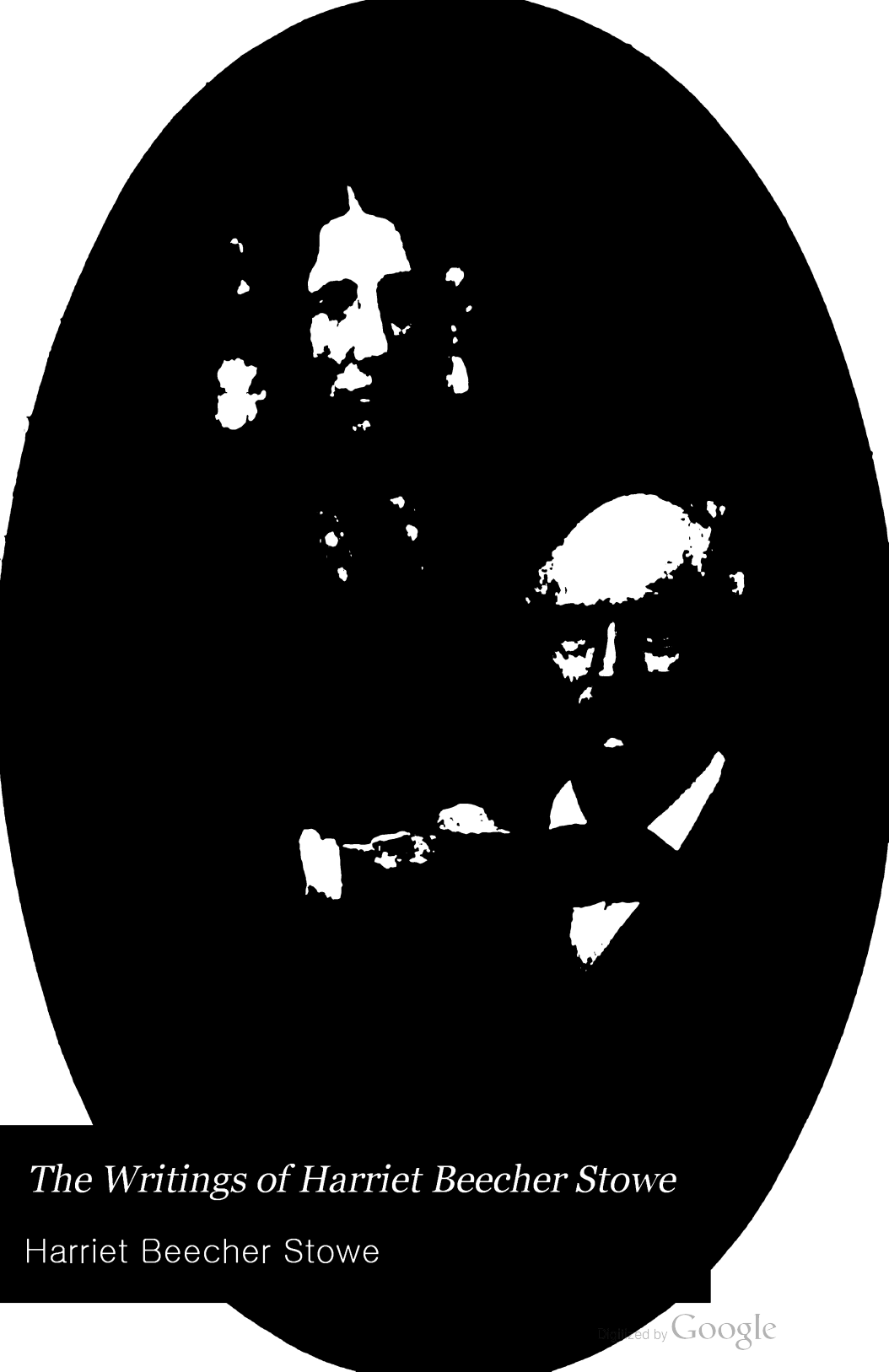

The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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WOMAN'S ARCHIVES

Gift of

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The Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe

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OLDTOWN FOLKS

AND

SAM LAWSON'S OLDTOWN FIRESIDE STORIES

BY

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME I

CAMBRIDGE

Printed at the Riverside Press

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The frontispiece (Professor and Mrs. Stowe) is from a daguerreotype taken in 1848.
The vignette (the old Natick church) is from a drawing by Howard Pyle.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE *Household Stories and Sketches* were written, it appears, in connection with the removal of Mrs. Stowe to Hartford and the establishment of a new home there. It is interesting to note that when in 1867 she made another remove to Florida and was at her farthest from New England, the most considerable work she undertook was that which was to preserve in a striking form the traditions of New England country life. In a description by her son of the group at Mandarin, a conspicuous figure is that of Professor Stowe, with his snow-white, patriarchal beard and kindly face, enjoying a mellow old age. Without her husband's help, Mrs. Stowe would scarcely have written *Oldtown Folks* or *Oldtown Fireside Stories*. She threw her own personal recollections into other books redolent with New England life, as *Poganuc People*, for example, but the characters and incidents of these two books were largely built upon the foundations of Professor Stowe's memory and the experience of his boyhood at Natick, a score of miles or so from Boston.

He was indeed more than the first hand authority for the tales, he was himself one of the characters sketched. In a letter to Mrs. Stowe written in 1882, George Eliot says: "I was much impressed with the fact — which you have told me — that he [Professor Stowe] was the original of the 'visionary boy' in *Oldtown Folks*, and it must be deeply interesting to talk with him on his experience." Professor Stowe had himself written to George Eliot of Hume the medium, then making a stir with his spiritualistic demonstrations: "Hume spent his boyhood in my

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father's native town, among my relatives and acquaintances. He certainly has qualities which science has not yet explained, and some of his doings are as real as they are strange. My interest in the subject of spiritualism arises from the fact of my own experience, more than sixty years ago, in my early childhood. I then never thought of questioning the objective reality of all I saw, and supposed that everybody else had the same experience. Of what this experience was, you may gain some idea from certain passages in *Oldtown Folks.*" So strongly did this supersensual manifestation affect both Professor Stowe and his wife, and so much did it tinge the narratives included in this work that it is pertinent to give here some passages from a history of his psychical adventures written by Professor Stowe as far back as 1834, before he had married a second time: —

"As early as I can remember anything, I can remember observing a multitude of animated and active objects, which I could see with perfect distinctness, moving about me, and could sometimes, though seldom, hear them make a rustling noise, or other articulate sounds; but I could never touch them. They were in all respects independent of the sense of touch, and incapable of being obstructed in any way by the intervention of material objects; I could see them at any distance, and through any intervening object, with as much ease and distinctness as if they were in the room with me, and directly before my eyes. I could see them passing through the floors, and the ceilings, and the walls of the house, from one apartment to another, in all directions, without a door, or a keyhole, or crevice being open to admit them. I could follow them with my eyes to any distance, or directly through or just beneath the surface, or up and down, in the midst of boards and timbers and bricks, or whatever else would stop the motion or intercept the visibleness of other objects. These

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appearances occasioned neither surprise nor alarm, except when they assumed some hideous and frightful form, or exhibited some menacing gesture, for I became acquainted with them as soon as with any of the objects of sense. As to the reality of their existence and the harmlessness of their character, I knew no difference between them and any other of the objects which met my eye. They were as familiar to me as the forms of my parents and my brother; they made up a part of my daily existence, and were as really the subjects of my consciousness as the little bench on which I sat in the corner by my mother's knee, or the wheels and sticks and strings with which I amused myself upon the floor. I indeed recognized a striking difference between them and the things which I could feel and handle, but to me this difference was no more a matter of surprise than that which I observed between my mother and the black woman who so often came to work for her; or between my infant brother and the little spotted dog Brutus of which I was so fond. There was no time, or place, or circumstance, in which they did not occasionally make their appearance. Solitude and silence, however, were more favorable to their appearance than company and conversation. They were more pleased with candle-light than the daylight. They were most numerous, distinct, and active when I was alone and in the dark, especially when my mother had laid me in bed and returned to her own room with the candle. At such times, I always expected the company of my aerial visitors, and counted upon it to amuse me till I dropped asleep. Whenever they failed to make their appearance, as was sometimes the case, I felt lonely and discontented. I kept up a lively conversation with them, — not by language or by signs, for the attempt on my part to speak or move would at once break the charm and drive them away in a fret, but by a peculiar sort of spiritual intercommunion.

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"When their attention was directed towards me, I could feel and respond to all their thoughts and feelings, and was conscious that they could in the same manner feel and respond to mine. Sometimes they would take no notice of me, but carry on a brisk conversation among themselves, principally by looks and gestures, with now and then an audible word. In fact, there were but few with whom I was very familiar. These few were much more constant and uniform in their visits than the great multitude, who were frequently changing, and too much absorbed in their own concerns to think much of me. I scarcely know how I can give an idea of their form and general appearance, for there are no objects in the material world with which I can compare them, and no language adapted to an accurate description of their peculiarities. They exhibited all possible combinations of size, shape, proportion, and color, but their most usual appearance was with the human form and proportion, but under a shadowy outline that seemed just ready to melt into the invisible air, and sometimes liable to the most sudden and grotesque changes, and with a uniform darkly bluish color spotted with brown, or brownish-white. This was the general appearance of the multitude; but there were many exceptions to this description, particularly among my more welcome and familiar visitors, as will be seen in the sequel.

"Besides these rational and generally harmless beings, there was another set of objects which never varied in their form or qualities, and were always mischievous and terrible. The fact of their appearance depended very much on the state of my health and feelings. If I was well and cheerful they seldom troubled me; but when sick or depressed they were sure to obtrude their hateful presence upon me. These were a sort of heavy clouds floating about overhead, of a black color, spotted with brown, in the shape of a very flaring inverted tunnel

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without a nozzle, and from ten to thirty or forty feet in diameter. They floated from place to place in great numbers, and in all directions, with a strong and steady progress, but with a tremulous, quivering, internal motion that agitated them in every part.

"Whenever they approached, the rational phantoms were thrown into great consternation; and well it might be, for if a cloud touched any part of one of the rational phantoms it immediately communicated its own color and tremulous motion to the part it touched.

"In spite of all the efforts and convulsive struggles of the unhappy victim, this color and motion slowly, but steadily and uninterruptedly, proceeded to diffuse itself over every part of the body, and as fast as it did so the body was drawn into the cloud and became a part of its substance. It was indeed a fearful sight to see the contortions, the agonizing efforts, of the poor creatures who had been touched by one of these awful clouds, and were dissolving and melting into it by inches without the possibility of escape or resistance.

"This was the only visible object that had the least power over the phantoms, and this was evidently composed of the same material as themselves. The forms and actions of all these phantoms varied very much with the state of my health and animal spirits, but I never could discover that the surrounding material objects had any influence upon them, except in this one particular, namely, if I saw them in a neat, well furnished room, there was a neatness and polish in their form and motions; and, on the contrary, if I was in an unfinished, rough apartment, there was a corresponding rudeness and roughness in my aerial visitors. A corresponding difference was visible when I saw them in the woods or in the meadows, upon the water or upon the ground, in the air or among the stars.

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"Every different apartment which I occupied had a different set of phantoms, and they always had a degree of correspondence to the circumstances in which they were seen. (It should be noted, however, that it was not so much the place where the phantoms themselves appeared to me to be, that affected their forms and movements, as the place in which I myself actually was while observing them. The apparent locality of the phantoms, it is true, had some influence, but my own actual locality had much more.)

"Thus far I have attempted only a general outline of these curious experiences. I will now proceed to a detailed account of several particular incidents, for the sake of illustrating the general statements already made. I select a few from manifestations without number. I am able to ascertain dates from the following circumstances: —

"I was born in April, 1802, and my father died in July, 1808, after suffering for more than a year from a lingering organic disease. Between two and three years before his death he removed from the house in which I was born to another at a little distance from it. What occurred, therefore, before my father's last sickness, must have taken place during the first five years of my life, and whatever took place before the removal of the family must have taken place during the first three years of my life. Before the removal of the family, I slept in a small upper chamber in the front part of the house, where I was generally alone for several hours in the evening and morning. Adjoining this room, and opening into it by a very small door, was a low, dark, narrow, unfinished closet, which was open on the other side into a ruinous old chaise-house. This closet was a famous place for the gambols of the phantoms, but of their forms and actions I do not now retain any very distinct recollection. I only remember that I was very careful not to do anything that I thought

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would be likely to offend them; yet otherwise their presence caused me no uneasiness, and was not at all disagreeable to me.

"The first incident of which I have a distinct recollection was the following: —

"One night as I was lying alone in my chamber with my little dog Brutus snoring beside my bed, there came out of the closet a very large Indian woman and a very small Indian man, with a huge bass-viol between them. The woman was dressed in a large, loose, black gown, secured around her waist by a belt of the same material, and on her head she wore a high, dark gray fur cap, shaped somewhat like a lady's muff, ornamented with a row of covered buttons in front, and open towards the bottom, showing a red lining. The man was dressed in a shabby black-colored overcoat and a little round, black hat that fitted closely to his head. They took no notice of me, but were rather ill-natured towards each other, and seemed to be disputing for the possession of the bass-viol. The man snatched it away and struck upon it a few harsh, hollow notes, which I distinctly heard, and which seemed to vibrate through my whole body, with a strange, stinging sensation. The woman then took it and appeared to play very intently and much to her own satisfaction, but without producing any sound that was perceptible by me. They soon left the chamber, and I saw them go down into the back kitchen, where they sat and played and talked with my mother. It was only when the man took the bow that I could hear the harsh, abrupt, disagreeable sounds of the instrument. At length they arose, went out of the back door, and sprang upon a large heap of straw and unthreshed beans, and disappeared with a strange, rumbling sound. This vision was repeated night after night with scarcely any variation while we lived in that house, and once, and once only, after the family had re-

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moved to the other house. The only thing that seemed to me unaccountable and that excited my curiosity was that there should be such a large heap of straw and beans before the door every night, when I could see nothing of it in the day time. I frequently crept out of bed and stole softly down into the kitchen, and peeped out of the door to see if it was there very early in the morning.

"I attempted to make some inquiries of my mother, but as I was not yet very skillful in the use of language, I could get no satisfaction out of her answers, and could see that my questions seemed to distress her. At first she took little notice of what I said, regarding it no doubt as the meaningless prattle of a thoughtless child. My persistence, however, seemed to alarm her, and I suppose she feared for my sanity. I soon desisted from asking anything further, and shut myself more and more within myself. One night, very soon after the removal, when the house was still and all the family were in bed, these unearthly musicians once made their appearance in the kitchen of the new house, and after looking around peevishly, and sitting with a discontented frown and in silence, they arose and went out of the back door, and sprang on a pile of cornstalks, and I saw them no more.

"Our new dwelling was a low-studded house of only one story, and, instead of an upper chamber, I now occupied a bedroom that opened into the kitchen. Within this bedroom, directly on the left hand of the door, as you entered from the kitchen, was the staircase which led to the garret; and, as the room was unfinished, some of the boards which inclosed the staircase were too short, and left a considerable space between them and the ceiling. One of these open spaces was directly in front of my bed, so that when I lay upon my pillow my face was opposite to it. Every night, after I had gone to bed and the candle was removed, a very pleasant-looking human face

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would peer at me over the top of that board, and gradually press forward his head, neck, shoulders, and finally his whole body as far as the waist, through the opening, and then smiling upon me with great good-nature, would withdraw in the same manner in which he had entered. He was a great favorite of mine; for though we neither of us spoke, we perfectly understood, and were entirely devoted to, each other. It is a singular fact that the features of this favorite phantom bore a very close resemblance to those of a boy older than myself whom I feared and hated: still the resemblance was so strong that I called him by the same name, Harvey.

"Harvey's visits were always expected and always pleasant; but sometimes there were visitations of another sort, odious and frightful. One of these I will relate as a specimen of the rest.

"One night, after I had retired to bed and was looking for Harvey, I observed an unusual number of the tunnel-shaped tremulous clouds already described, and they seemed intensely black and strongly agitated. This alarmed me exceedingly, and I had a terrible feeling that something awful was going to happen. It was not long before I saw Harvey at his accustomed place, cautiously peeping at me through the aperture, with an expression of pain and terror on his countenance. He seemed to warn me to be on my guard, but was afraid to put his head into the room lest he should be touched by one of the clouds, which were every moment growing thicker and more numerous. Harvey soon withdrew and left me alone. On turning my eyes toward the left-hand wall of the room, I thought I saw at an immense distance below me the regions of the damned, as I had heard them pictured in sermons. From this awful world of horror the tunnel-shaped clouds were ascending, and I perceived that they were the principal instruments of torture in these gloomy abodes. These regions were at

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such an immense distance below me that I could obtain but a very indistinct view of the inhabitants, who were very numerous and exceedingly active. Near the surface of the earth, and as it seemed to me but a little distance from my bed, I saw four or five sturdy, resolute devils endeavoring to carry off an unprincipled and dissipated man in the neighborhood, by the name of Brown, of whom I had stood in terror for years. These devils I saw were very different from the common representations. They had neither red faces, nor horns, nor hoofs, nor tails. They were in all respects stoutly built and well dressed gentlemen. The only peculiarity that I noted in their appearance was as to their heads. Their faces and necks were perfectly bare, without hair or flesh, and of a uniform sky-blue color, like the ashes of burnt paper before it falls to pieces, and of a certain glossy smoothness.

"As I looked on, full of eagerness, the devils struggled to force Brown down with them, and Brown struggled with the energy of desperation to save himself from their grip, and it seemed that the human was likely to prove too strong for the infernal. In this emergency one of the devils, panting for breath and covered with perspiration, beckoned to a strong, thick cloud that seemed to understand him perfectly, and, whirling up to Brown, touched his hand. Brown resisted stoutly, and struck out right and left at the cloud most furiously, but the usual effect was produced, — the hand grew black, quivered, and seemed to be melting into the cloud; then the arm, by slow degrees, and then the head and shoulders. At this instant Brown, collecting all his energies for one desperate effort, sprang at once into the centre of the cloud, tore it asunder, and descended to the ground, exclaiming, with a hoarse, furious voice that grated on my ear, 'There, I've got out; dam'me if I have n't!' This was the first word that had been spoken through the whole horrible scene.

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It was the first time I had ever seen a cloud fail to produce its appropriate result, and it terrified me so that I trembled from head to foot. The devils, however, did not seem to be in the least discouraged. One of them, who seemed to be the leader, went away and quickly returned bringing with him an enormous pair of rollers fixed in an iron frame, such as are used in iron-mills for the purpose of rolling out and slitting bars of iron, except instead of being turned by machinery, each roller was turned by an immense crank. Three of the devils now seized Brown and put his feet to the rollers, while two others stood, one at each crank, and began to roll him in with a steady strain that was entirely irresistible. Not a word was spoken, not a sound was heard; but the fearful struggles and terrified, agonizing looks of Brown were more than I could endure. I sprang from my bed and ran through the kitchen into the room where my parents slept, and entreated that they would permit me to spend the remainder of the night with them. After considerable parleying they assured me that nothing could hurt me, and advised me to go back to bed. I replied that I was not afraid of their hurting me, but I could n't bear to see them acting so with C. Brown. 'Poh! poh! you foolish boy,' replied my father, sternly. 'You 've only been dreaming; go right back to bed, or I shall have to whip you.' Knowing that there was no other alternative, I trudged back through the kitchen with all the courage I could muster, cautiously entered my room, where I found everything quiet, there being neither cloud, nor devil, nor anything of the kind to be seen, and getting into bed I slept quietly till morning. The next day I was rather sad and melancholy, but kept all my troubles to myself, through fear of Brown. This happened before my father's sickness, and consequently between the four and six years of my age.

"During my father's sickness and after his death I

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lived with my grandmother; and when I had removed to her house I forever lost sight of Harvey. I still continued to sleep alone for the most part, but in a neatly furnished upper chamber. Across the corner of the chamber, opposite to and at a little distance from the head of my bed, there was a closet in the form of an old-fashioned buffet. After going to bed, on looking at the door of this closet, I could see at a great distance from it a pleasant meadow, terminated by a beautiful little grove. Out of this grove, and across this meadow, a charming little female figure would advance, about eight inches high and exquisitely proportioned, dressed in a loose black silk robe, with long, smooth black hair parted up her head and hanging loose over her shoulders. She would come forward with a slow and regular step, becoming more distinctly visible as she approached nearer, till she came even with the surface of the closet door, when she would smile upon me, raise her hands to her head and draw them down on each side of her face, suddenly turn round, and go off at a rapid trot. The moment she turned I could see a good-looking mulatto man, rather smaller than herself, following directly in her wake and trotting off after her. This was generally repeated two or three times before I went to sleep. The features of the mulatto bore some resemblance to those of the Indian man with the bass-viol, but were much more mild and agreeable.

. . . . . .

"I awoke one bright moonlight night, and found a large, full-length human skeleton of an ashy-blue color in bed with me! I screamed out with fright, and soon summoned the family around me. I refused to tell the cause of my alarm, but begged permission to occupy another bed, which was granted.

"For the remainder of the night I slept but little; but I saw upon the window-stools companies of little fairies,

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about six inches high, in white robes, gamboling and dancing with incessant merriment. Two of them, a male and female, rather taller than the rest, were dignified with a crown and sceptre. They took the kindest notice of me, smiled upon me with great benignity, and seemed to assure me of their protection. I was soothed and cheered by their presence, though after all there was a sort of sinister and selfish expression in their countenances which prevented my placing implicit confidence in them.

"Up to this time I had never doubted the real existence of these phantoms, nor had I ever suspected that other people did not see them as distinctly as myself. I now, however, began to discover with no little anxiety that my friends had little or no knowledge of the aerial beings among whom I had spent my whole life; that my allusions to them were not understood, and all complaints respecting them were laughed at. I had never been disposed to say much about them, and this discovery confirmed me in my silence. It did not, however, affect my own belief, or lead me to suspect that my imaginations were not realities.

"During the whole of this period I took great pleasure in walking out alone, particularly in the evening. The most lonely fields, the woods, and the banks of the river, and other places most completely secluded, were my favorite resorts, for there I could enjoy the sight of innumerable aerial beings of all sorts, without interruption. Every object, even every shaking leaf, seemed to me to be animated by some living soul, whose nature in some degree corresponded to its habitation. I spent much of my life in these solitary rambles; there were particular places to which I gave names, and visited them at regular intervals. Moonlight was particularly agreeable to me, but most of all I enjoyed a thick, foggy night. At times, during these walks, I would be excessively oppressed by an indefinite

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and deep feeling of melancholy. Without knowing why, I would be so unhappy as to wish myself annihilated, and suddenly it would occur to me that my friends at home were suffering some dreadful calamity, and so vivid would be the impression, that I would hasten home with all speed to see what had taken place. At such seasons I felt a morbid love for my friends that would almost burn up my soul, and yet, at the least provocation from them, I would fly into an uncontrollable passion and foam like a little fury. I was called a dreadful-tempered boy; but the Lord knows that I never occasioned pain to any animal, whether human or brutal, without suffering untold agonies in consequence of it. I cannot, even now, without feelings of deep sorrow, call to mind the alternate fits of corroding melancholy, irritation, and bitter remorse which I then endured. These fits of melancholy were most constant and oppressive during the autumnal months.

"I very early learned to read, and soon became immoderately attached to books. In the Bible I read the first chapters of Job, and parts of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation, with most intense delight, and with such frequency that I could repeat large portions from memory long before the age at which boys in the country are usually able to read plain sentences. The first large book besides the Bible that I remember reading was Morse's *History of New England*, which I devoured with insatiable greediness, particularly those parts which relate to Indian wars and witchcraft. I was in the habit of applying to my grandmother for explanations, and she would relate to me, while I listened with breathless attention, long stories from Mather's *Magnalia* or (Magnilly, as she used to call it), a work which I earnestly longed to read, but of which I never got sight till after my twentieth year. Very early there fell into my hand an old school-book, called *The Art of Speaking*, containing numerous extracts from Mil-

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ton and Shakespeare. There was little else in the book that interested me, but these extracts from the two great English poets, though there were many things in them that I did not well understand, I read again and again, with increasing pleasure at every perusal, till I had nearly committed them to memory, and almost thumbed the old book into nonenity. But of all the books that I read at this period, there was none that went to my heart like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. I read it and re-read it night and day; I took it to bed with me and hugged it to my bosom while I slept; every different edition that I could find I seized upon and read with as eager curiosity as if it had been a new story throughout; and I read with the unspeakable satisfaction of most devoutly believing that everything which 'Honest John' related was a real verity, an actual occurrence. Oh that I could read that most inimitable book once more with the same solemn conviction of its literal truth, that I might once more enjoy the same untold ecstacy!

"One other remark it seems proper to make before I proceed further to details. The appearance, and especially the motions, of my aerial visitors were intimately connected, either as cause or effect, I cannot determine which, with certain sensations of my own. Their countenances generally expressed pleasure or pain, complaisance or anger, according to the mood of my own mind: if they moved from place to place without moving their limbs, with that gliding motion appropriate to spirits, I felt in my stomach that peculiar tickling sensation which accompanies a rapid progressive movement through the air; and if they went off with an uneasy trot, I felt an unpleasant jarring through my frame. Their appearance was always attended with considerable effort and fatigue on my part: the more distinct and vivid they were, the more would my fatigue be increased; and at such times my face was always pale, and

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my eyes unusually sparkling and wild. This continued to be the case after I became satisfied that it was all a delusion of the imagination, and it so continues to the present day."

It is easy to see how in Mrs. Stowe's hands not only her husband's boyish history but the incidents, amusing and otherwise, which gathered about his memory would be reproduced in the vernacular. There was no strongly marked difference between the Natick of Professor Stowe's boyhood, and the Litchfield of Mrs. Stowe's girlhood, and with a gusto which comes to a writer dealing with familiar and yet bygone scenes, Mrs. Stowe wrote out in her Florida home the two books which are part and parcel of one theme. The interest awakened by *Oldtown Folks* naturally led to a demand for further stories, and *Oldtown Fireside Stories* were nearly all contributed to *The Atlantic Monthly* before being gathered into a book.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

GENTLE READER, — It is customary to omit prefaces. I beg you to make an exception in my particular case; I have something I really want to say. I have an object in this book, more than the mere telling of a story, and you can always judge of a book better if you compare it with the author's object. My object is to interpret to the world the New England life and character in that particular time of its history which may be called the seminal period. I would endeavor to show you New England in its *seed-bed*, before the hot suns of modern progress had developed its sprouting germs into the great trees of to-day.

New England has been to these United States what the Dorian hive was to Greece. It has always been a capital country to emigrate from, and North, South, East, and West have been populated largely from New England, so that the seed-bed of New England was the seed-bed of this great American Republic, and of all that is likely to come of it.

New England people cannot be thus interpreted without calling into view many grave considerations and necessitating some serious thinking.

In doing this work, I have tried to make my mind as still and passive as a looking-glass, or a mountain lake, and then to give you merely the images reflected there. I desire that you should see the characteristic persons of those times, and hear them talk; and sometimes I have taken an author's liberty of explaining their characters to you, and telling you why they talked and lived as they did.

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My studies for this object have been Pre-Raphaelite, — taken from real characters, real scenes, and real incidents. And some of those things in the story which may appear most romantic and like fiction are simple renderings and applications of facts.

Any one who may be curious enough to consult Rev. Elias Nason's book, called "Sir Charles Henry Frankland, or Boston in the Colonial Times," will there see a full description of the old manor-house which in this story is called the Dench House. It was by that name I always heard it spoken of in my boyhood.

In portraying the various characters which I have introduced, I have tried to maintain the part simply of a sympathetic spectator. I propose neither to teach nor preach through them, any farther than any spectator of life is preached to by what he sees of the workings of human nature around him.

Though Calvinist, Arminian, High-Church Episcopalian, skeptic, and simple believer all speak in their turn, I merely listen, and endeavor to understand and faithfully represent the inner life of each. I myself am but the observer and reporter, seeing much, doubting much, questioning much, and believing with all my heart in only a very few things.

And so I take my leave of you.

HORACE HOLYOKE.

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OLDTOWN FOLKS

CHAPTER I

OLDTOWN AND THE MINISTER

It has always been a favorite idea of mine, that there is so much of the human in every man, that the life of any one individual, however obscure, if really and vividly perceived in all its aspirations, struggles, failures, and successes, would command the interest of all others. This is my only apology for offering my life as an open page to the reading of the public.

Besides this, however, every individual is part and parcel of a great picture of the society in which he lives and acts, and his life cannot be painted without reproducing the picture of the world he lived in; and it has appeared to me that my life might recall the image and body of a period in New England most peculiar and most interesting, the impress of which is now rapidly fading away. I mean the ante-railroad times, — the period when our own hard, rocky, sterile New England was a sort of half Hebrew theocracy, half ultra-democratic republic of little villages, separated by a pathless ocean from all the civilization and refinement of the Old World, forgotten and unnoticed, and yet burning like live coals under this obscurity with all the fervid activity of an intense, newly kindled, peculiar, and individual life.

My early life lies in one of these quiet little villages, —

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that of Oldtown, in Massachusetts. It was as pretty a village as ever laid itself down to rest on the banks of a tranquil river. The stream was one of those limpid children of the mountains, whose brown, clear waters ripple with a soft yellow light over many-colored pebbles, now brawling and babbling on rocky bottoms, dashing hither and thither in tiny cascades, throwing white spray over green mossed rocks, and then again sweeping silently, with many a winding curve, through soft green meadows, nursing on its bosom troops of water-lilies, and bordering its banks with blue and white violets, snow-flaked meadow-sweet, and wild iris. Hither and thither, in the fertile tracts of meadow or upland through which this little stream wound, were some two dozen farmhouses, hid in green hollows, or perched on breezy hill-tops; while close alongside of the river, at its widest and deepest part, ran one rustic street, thickly carpeted with short, velvet green grass, where stood the presiding buildings of the village.

First among these was the motherly meeting-house, with its tall, white spire, its ample court of sheds and stalls for the shelter of the horses and the various farm-wagons which came in to Sunday services. There was also the school-house, the Academy, and Israel Scran's store, where everything was sold, from hoe-handles up to cambric needles, where the post-office was kept, and where was a general exchange of news, as the different farm-wagons stood hitched around the door, and their owners spent a leisure moment in discussing politics or theology from the top of codfish or mackerel barrels, while their wives and daughters were shopping among the dress goods and ribbons, on the other side of the store. Next to the store was the tavern, — with a tall sign-post which used to creak and flap in the summer winds, with a leisurely, rich, easy sort of note of invitation, — a broad veranda in front, with benches, — an open tap-room, where great barrels of beer were kept

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on draft, and a bar where the various articles proscribed by the temperance society were in those days allowed an open and respectable standing. This tavern veranda and tap-room was another general exchange, not in those days held in the ill repute of such resorts now. The minister himself, in all the magnificence of his cocked hat and ample clerical wig, with his gold-headed cane in his hand, would sometimes step into the tap-room of a cold winter morning, and order a mug of flip from obsequious Amaziah the host, and, while he sipped it, would lecture with a severe gravity a few idle, ragged fellows who were spending too much time in those seductive precincts. The clergy in those days felt that they never preached temperance with so warm a fervor as between the comfortable sips of a beverage of whose temperate use they intended to be shining examples. The most vivid image of respectability and majesty which a little boy born in a Massachusetts village in those early days could form was the minister. In the little theocracy which the Pilgrims established in the wilderness, the ministry was the only order of nobility. They were the only privileged class, and their voice it was that decided *ex cathedra* on all questions both in Church and State, from the choice of a Governor to that of the district-school teacher.

Our minister, as I remember him, was one of the cleanest, most gentlemanly, most well bred of men, — never appearing without all the decorums of silk stockings, shining knee and shoe buckles, well-brushed shoes, immaculately powdered wig, out of which shone his clear, calm, serious face, like the moon out of a fleecy cloud.

Oldtown was originally an Indian town, and one of the most numerous and powerful of the Indian tribes had possessed the beautiful tracts of meadow and upland farms that bordered the Sepaug River. Here the great apostle of the Indians had established the first missionary enterprise among

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them, under the patronage of a society in England for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts; here he had labored and taught and prayed with a fervor which bowed all hearts to his sway, and gathered from the sons of the forest a church of devoted Christians. The harsh guttural Indian language, in the fervent alembic of his loving study, was melted into a written dialect; a Bible and hymn-book and spelling-book seemed to open a path to an Indian literature. He taught them agriculture, and many of the arts and trades of civilized life. But he could not avert the doom which seems to foreordain that those races shall dry up and pass away with their native forests, as the brook dries up when the pines and hemlocks which shaded its source are torn away.

In my boyhood, three generations had passed since the apostle died. The elms which two grateful Indian catechumens had set out as little saplings on either side of his gateway were now two beautiful pillars, supporting each its firmament of leafy boughs, and giving a grand air of scholarly retirement to the plain, old-fashioned parsonage; but the powerful Indian tribe had dwindled to a few scattered families, living an uncertain and wandering life on the outskirts of the thrift and civilization of the whites.

Our minister was one of those cold, clear-cut, polished crystals that are formed in the cooling-down of society, after it has been melted and purified by a great enthusiasm. Nobody can read Dr. Cotton Mather's biography of the first ministers of Massachusetts, without feeling that they were men whose whole souls were in a state of fusion, by their conceptions of an endless life; that the ruling forces which impelled them were the sublimities of a world to come; and that, if there be such a thing possible as perfect faith in the eternal and invisible, and perfect loyalty to God and to conscience, these men were pervaded by it.

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More than this, many of them were men of a softened and tender spirit, bowed by past afflictions, who had passed through the refining fires of martyrdom, and come to this country, counting not home or kindred dear to them, that they might found a commonwealth for the beloved name and honor of One who died for them. *Christo et Ecclesiæ* was the seal with which they consecrated all their life-work, from the founding of Harvard College down to the district school in every village. These men lived in the full spirit of him who said, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;" and the power of this invisible and mighty love shed a softening charm over the austere grandeur of their lives. They formed a commonwealth where vice was wellnigh impossible; where such landmarks and boundaries and buttresses and breast-works hedged in and defended the morality of a community, that to go very far out of the way would require some considerable ingenuity and enterprise.

The young men grew up grave and decorous through the nursing of church, catechism, and college, all acting in one line; and in due time many studious and quiet youths stepped, in regular succession, from the college to the theological course, and thence to the ministry, as their natural and appointed work. They received the articles of faith as taught in their catechism without dispute, and took their places calmly and without opposition to assist in carrying on a society where everything had been arranged to go under their direction, and they were the recognized and appointed leaders and governors.

The Rev. Mr. Lothrop had come of good ministerial blood for generations back. His destination had always been for the pulpit. He was possessed of one of those calm, quiet, sedate natures, to whom the temptations of turbulent nerves or vehement passions are things utterly incomprehensible.

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Now, however stringent and pronounced may be the forms in which one's traditional faith may have been expressed, it is certain that temperament gradually, and with irresistible power, modifies one's creed. Those features of a man's professed belief which are unsympathetic with his nature become to his mind involved in a perpetual haze and cloud of disuse; while certain others, which are congenial, become vivid and pronounced; and thus, practically, the whole faith of the man changes without his ever being aware of the fact himself.

Parson Lothrop belonged to a numerous class in the third generation of Massachusetts clergy, commonly called Arminian, — men in whom this insensible change had been wrought from the sharply defined and pronounced Calvinism of the early fathers. They were mostly scholarly, quiet men, of calm and philosophic temperament, who, having from infancy walked in all the traditions of a virtuous and pious education, and passed from grade to grade of their progress with irreproachable quiet and decorum, came to regard the spiritual struggles and conflicts, the wrestlings and tears, the fastings and temptations of their ancestors with a secret skepticism, — to dwell on moralities, virtues, and decorums, rather than on those soul-stirring spiritual mysteries which still stood forth unquestioned and uncontradicted in their confessions of faith.

Parson Lothrop fulfilled with immaculate precision all the proprieties exacted in his station. Oldtown having been originally an Indian missionary station, an annual stipend was paid the pastor of this town from a fund originally invested in England for the conversion of the Indians; and so Parson Lothrop had the sounding-board of Eliot's pulpit put up over the great arm-chair in his study, and used to call thither weekly the wandering remnants of Indian tribes to be catechised. He did not, like his great predecessor, lecture them on the original depravity of the

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heart, the need of a radical and thorough regeneration by the Holy Spirit of God, or the power of Jesus as a Saviour from sin, but he talked to them of the evil of drunkenness and lying and idleness, and exhorted them to be temperate and industrious; and when they, notwithstanding his exhortations, continued to lead an unthrifty, wandering life, he calmly expressed his conviction that they were children of the forest, a race destined to extinction with the progress of civilization, but continued his labors for them with automatic precision.

His Sunday sermons were well-written specimens of the purest and most elegant Addisonian English, and no mortal could find fault with a word that was in them, as they were sensible, rational, and religious, as far as they went. Indeed, Mr. Lothrop was quite an elegant scholar and student in literature, and more than once surprise had been expressed to him that he should be willing to employ his abilities in so obscure a town and for so inconsiderable a salary. His reply was characteristic. "My salary is indeed small, but it is as certain as the Bank of England, and retirement and quiet give me leisure for study."

He, however, mended his worldly prospects by a matrimonial union with a widow lady of large property, from one of the most aristocratic families of Boston. Mrs. Dorothea Lucretia Dixwell was the widow of a Tory merchant, who, by rare skill in trimming his boat to suit the times, had come through the Revolutionary war with a handsome property unimpaired, which, dying shortly after, he left to his widow. Mrs. Dixwell was in heart and soul an Englishwoman, an adorer of church and king, a worshiper of aristocracy and all the powers that be. She owned a pew in Christ Church, and clung more punctiliously than ever to her prayer-book, when all other memorials of our connection with the mother country had departed.

Could it be thought that the elegant and rich widow

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would smile on the suit of an obscure country Congregational clergyman? Yet she did; and for it there were many good reasons. Parson Lothrop was a stately, handsome, well-proportioned man, and had the formal and ceremonious politeness of a gentleman of the old school, and by family descent Mrs. Dorothea's remembrance could trace back his blood to that of some very solid families among the English gentry, and as there were no more noblemen to be had in America, marrying a minister in those days was the next best thing to it; and so Mrs. Dixwell became Mrs. Parson Lothrop, and made a processional entrance into Oldtown in her own coach, and came therein to church the first Sunday after her marriage, in all the pomp of a white brocade, with silver flowers on it of life-size, and white satin slippers with heels two inches high. This was a great grace to show to a Congregational church, but Mrs. Lothrop knew the duty of a wife, and conformed to it heroically. Nor was Parson Lothrop unmindful of the courtesies of a husband in this matrimonial treaty, for it was stipulated and agreed that Madam Lothrop should have full liberty to observe in her own proper person all the festivals and fasts of the Church of England, should be excused from all company and allowed to keep the seclusion of her own apartment on Good Friday, and should proceed immediately thereafter in her own coach to Boston, to be present at the Easter services in Christ Church. The same procession to Boston in her own coach took place also on Whitsunday and Christmas. Moreover she decked her house with green boughs and made mince-pies at Christmas time, and in short conducted her housekeeping in all respects as a zealous member of the Church of England ought.

In those days of New England, the minister and his wife were considered the temporal and spiritual superiors of everybody in the parish. The idea which has since

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gained ground, of regarding the minister and his family as a sort of stipendiary attachment and hired officials of the parish, to be overlooked, schooled, advised, rebuked, and chastened by every deacon and deacon's wife or rich and influential parishioner, had not then arisen. Parson Lothrop was so calmly awful in his sense of his own position and authority, that it would have been a sight worth seeing to witness any of his parish coming to him, as deacons and influential parishioners nowadays feel at liberty to come to their minister, with suggestions and admonitions. His manner was ever gracious and affable, as of a man who habitually surveys every one from above, and is disposed to listen with indulgent courtesy, and has advice in reserve for all seekers; but there was not the slightest shadow of anything which encouraged the most presuming to offer counsel in return. And so the marriage with the rich Episcopal widow, her processional entry into Oldtown, the coach and outriders, the brocade and satin slippers, were all submitted to on the part of the Oldtown people without a murmur.

The fact is, that the parson himself felt within his veins the traditional promptings of a far-off church and king ancestry, and relished with a calm delight a solemn trot to the meeting-house behind a pair of fat, decorous old family horses, with a black coachman in livery on the box. It struck him as sensible and becoming. So also he liked a sideboard loaded with massive family plate, warmed up with the ruby hues of old wines of fifty years' ripening, gleaming through crystal decanters, and well-trained man-servants and maid-servants, through whom his wig, his shoes, and all his mortal belongings, received daily and suitable care. He was to Mrs. Dorothea the most deferential of husbands, always rising with stately courtesy to offer her a chair when she entered an apartment, and hastening to open the door for her if she wished to pass out, and

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passing every morning and evening the formal gallantries and inquiries in regard to her health and well-being which he felt that her state and condition required.

Fancy, if you can, the magnificent distance at which this sublime couple stood above a little ten-year-old boy, who wore a blue checked apron, and every day pattered barefoot after the cows, and who, at the time this story of myself begins, had just, by reaching up on his little bare tiptoes, struck the great black knocker on their front door.

The door was opened by a stately black servant, who had about him an indistinct and yet perceptible atmosphere of ministerial gravity and dignity, looking like a black doctor of divinity.

"Is Mr. Lothrop at home," I said, blushing to the roots of my hair.

"Yes, sonny," said the black condescendingly.

"Won't you please tell him father's dying, and mother wants him to come quick!" and with that, what with awe, and what with grief, I burst into tears.

The kind-hearted black relaxed from his majesty at once, and said: "Lord bress yer soul! why, don't cry now, honey, and I'll jes' call missis;" and in fact, before I knew it, he had opened the parlor door, and ushered me into the august presence of Lady Lothrop, as she used to be familiarly called in our village.

She was a tall, thin, sallow woman, looking very much like those portraits by Copley that still adorn some old houses in Boston; but she had a gentle voice, and a compassionate, womanly way with her. She comforted me with a cake, which she drew from the closet in the sideboard; decanted some very choice old wine into a bottle, which she said I was to carry to my mother, and be sure and tell her to take a little of it herself. She also desired me to give her a small book which she had found of use in times of affliction, called "The Mourner's Companion,"

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consisting mainly of choice selections from the English Book of Common Prayer.

When the minister came into the room, I saw that she gave a conjugal touch to the snowy plaited frill of his ruffled shirt, and a thoughtful inspection to the wide linen cambric frills which set off his well-formed hand, and which were a little discomposed by rubbing over his writing-table, — nay, even upon one of them a small stain of ink was visible, as the minister, unknown to himself, had drawn his ruffles over an undried portion of his next Sunday's sermon.

"Dinah must attend to this," she said; "here 's a spot requiring salts of lemon; and, my dear," she said, in an insinuating tone, holding out a richly bound velvet prayer-book, "would you not like to read our service for the Visitation of the Sick, — it 's so excellent."

"I am well aware of that, my love," said the minister, repelling her prayer-book with a gentle stateliness, "but I assure you, Dorothea, it would not do, — no, it would not do."

I thought the good lady sighed as her husband left the house, and looked longingly after him through the window as he walked down the yard. She probably consoled herself with the reflection that one could not have everything, and that her spouse, if not in the Established Church of England, was every way fitted to adorn it had he only been there.

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CHAPTER II

MY FATHER

My good reader, it must sometimes have fallen under your observation that there is a class of men who go through life under a cloud, for no other reason than that, being born with the nature of gentlemen, they are nevertheless poor. Such men generally live under a sense of the dissatisfaction and rebuke of our good mother world; and yet it is easy to see all the while that even a moderate competence would at any moment turn their faults into virtues, and make them in everybody's opinion model characters.

Now you know there are plants to whom poor soil or rich soil seems to make no manner of difference. Your mullein and your burdock do admirably on a gravelly hillside, and admirably in rich garden soil. Nothing comes amiss with them. But take a saffrano rose or a hyacinth, and turn it out to shift for itself by the roadside, and it soon dwindles and pines, and loses its color and shape, till everybody thinks such a wretched, ragged specimen of vegetation had better be out of the world than in it.

From all I remember of my poor father, he had the organization and tastes of a scholar and a gentleman; but he was born the son of a poor widow, who hardly knew from week to week where the few hard-earned dollars were to come from which kept her and her boy in the very plainest food and clothing. So she thought herself happy when she apprenticed him to a paper-maker. Thence he had fought his way up with his little boy hands towards what

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to him was light and life, — an education. Harvard College, to his eyes, was like the distant vision of the New Jerusalem to the Christian. Thither he aspired, thither he meant to go. Through many a self-denial, many an hour of toil, — studying his Latin grammar by night in the paper-mill, saving his odd pennies, and buying book after book, and treasuring each one as a mine of wealth, — he went on, till finally he gained enough of a standing to teach, first the common school, and then the Academy.

While he was teacher of the Academy he made his first false step, which was a false step only because he was poor, — he fell in love with my mother. If he had been well to do in the world, everybody would have said that it was the most natural and praiseworthy thing possible. It was some extenuation of his fault that my poor mother was very pretty and attractive; she was, in fact, one of my father's prettiest scholars. He saw her daily, and so the folly grew upon him, till he was ready to sacrifice his life's object, and consent to be all his days a poor academy teacher in Oldtown, that he might marry her.

One must be very much of a woman for whom a man can sacrifice the deepest purpose of his life without awaking to regret it. I do not say that my father did so; and yet I could see, from the earliest of my recollection, that ours was a household clouded by suppressed regrets, as well as embarrassed by real wants.

My mother was one of those bright, fair, delicate New England girls who remind us of the shell-pink of the wood-anemone, or the fragile wind-flower; and every one must remember how jauntily they toss their gay little heads as they grow in their own mossy dells, at the root of old oaks or beeches, but how quickly they become withered and bedraggled when we gather them.

My mother's gayety of animal spirits, her sparkle and vivacity, all went with the first year of marriage. The

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cares of housekeeping, the sicknesses of maternity and nursing, drained her dry of all that was bright and attractive; and my only recollections of her are of a little quiet, faded, mournful woman, who looked on my birth and that of my brother Bill as the greatest of possible misfortunes, and took care of us with a discouraged patience, more as if she pitied us for being born than as if she loved us.

My father seemed to regard her with a half-remorseful tenderness as he strove by extra reading and study to make up for the loss of that education the prospect of which he had sacrificed in his marriage. In common with a great many scholars of that day and of this, he ignored his body altogether, and tasked and strained his brain with night studies till his health sank under it; and consumption, which in New England stands ever waiting for victims, took his cold hand in hers, and led him quietly but irresistibly downward. Such, to this moment, was my father's history; and you will see the truth of what I have been saying, that a modest little property would have changed all his faults and mistakes into proprieties and virtues.

He had been sick so long, so very long, it seemed to my child-mind! and now there was approaching him that dark shadow so terrible to flesh and heart, in whose dimness every one feels an instinctive longing for aid. That something must be done for the dying to prepare them for their last lonesome journey is a strong instinct of every soul; and I had heard my mother pathetically urging my father that morning to send for the minister.

"What good will it do, Susy?" had been his answer, given with a sort of weary despondence; but still he had assented, and I had gone eagerly to bring him.

I was, for my part, strong in faith. I wanted to do something for my father, and I felt certain that the minister would know what was the right thing; and when I set forth with him, in his full panoply, — wig and ruffles and

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gold-headed cane, — I felt somehow as if the ark of the covenant was moving down the street to our house.

My mother met the minister at the door, with tears yet undried in her eyes, and responded in the fullest manner to the somewhat stately, but yet gracious, inquiries which he made as to my father's health and condition, and thanked him for the kindly messages and gifts of Lady Lothrop, which I had brought. Then he was shown into the sick-room. My father was lying propped up by pillows, and with the bright flush of his afternoon fever on his cheeks. He was always a handsome man, fastidious about his person and belongings; and as he lay with his long, thin hands folded together over the bed-clothes, his hair clinging in damp curls round his high, white forehead, and his large, clear hazel eyes kindled with an unnatural brightness, he formed on my childish memory a picture that will never fade. There was in his eyes at this moment that peculiar look of deep suffering which I have sometimes seen in the eyes of wounded birds or dying animals, something that spoke of a quiet, unutterable anguish.

My father had been not only a scholar, but a thinker, — one of those silent, peculiar natures whose thoughts and reasonings too often wander up and down the track of commonly received opinion, as Noah's dove of old, without finding rest for the sole of their foot. When a mind like this is approaching the confines of the eternal unknown, there is often a conflict of thought and emotion, the utterance of which to a receptive and sympathizing soul might bring relief. Something there was of intense yearning and inquiry in the first glance he threw on the minister, and then it changed to one of weary languor. With the quick spiritual instincts of that last dying hour, he had seen into the soul of the man, — that there was nothing there for him. Even the gold-headed cane was not the rod and staff for him in the dark valley.

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There was, in fact, something in the tranquil, calm, unpathetic nature of that good man, which rendered him peculiarly inapt to enter into the secret chamber of souls that struggle and suffer and doubt. He had a nature so evenly balanced, his course in life had been so quiet and unruffled, his speculations and doubts had been of so philosophical and tranquil a kind, that he was not in the least fitted to become father confessor to a sick and wounded spirit.

His nature was one that inclined to certain stately formalities and proprieties; and although he had, in accordance with his station in the Congregational church, put from him the forms of the Church of England, and was supposed to rely on the extemporaneous movements of the hour, his devotional exercises, nevertheless, had as much a stereotype form as if they had been printed in a book. We boys always knew when the time for certain familiar phrases and expressions would occur in his Sunday morning prayer, and exactly the welcome words which heralded the close of the afternoon exercise.

I remember now, as he knelt by my father's bedside, how far off and distant the usual opening formula of his prayer made the Great Helper to appear. "Supremely great, infinitely glorious, and ever-blessed God," it said, "grant that we may suitably realize the infinite distance between us, worms of the dust, and thy divine majesty."

I was gazing earnestly at my father, as he lay with his bright, yearning, troubled eyes looking out into the misty shadows of the eternal world, and I saw him close them wearily, and open them again, with an expression of quiet endurance. The infinite distance was a thing that he realized only too well; but who should tell him of an infinite *nearness* by which those who are far off are made nigh?

After the prayer, the minister expressed the hope that my father would be resigned to the decrees of infinite wisdom, and my father languidly assented; and then, with a

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ministerial benediction, the whole stately apparition of ghostly aid and comfort departed from our house.

One thing, at all events, had been gained, — my father had had the minister and been prayed with, and nobody in Oldtown could say that everything had not been properly done, according to the code of spiritual etiquette generally established. For our town, like other little places, always kept a wide-awake eye on the goings and doings of her children. Oldtown had had its own opinion of my father for a great while, and expressed it freely in tea-drinkings, quiltings, at the store, and at the tavern. If Oldtown's advice had been asked, there were a hundred things that he did which would have been left undone, and a hundred things done which he did not do. Oldtown knew just whom he ought to have married instead of marrying my mother, and was certain he could have had her too. Oldtown knew just how and when he might have made himself a rich man, and didn't. Oldtown knew exactly when, how, and why he caught the cold that set him into a consumption, and what he ought to have taken to cure it, and didn't. And now he was, so to speak, dying under a cloud, just as Oldtown always knew he would. But one thing was certain, and Oldtown was glad to hear of it, — he wasn't an infidel, as had been at different times insinuated, for he had had the minister and been prayed with; and so, though he never had joined the church, Oldtown indulged some hope for his hereafter.

When the minister was gone, my father said, with a weary smile: "There, Susy dear, I hope you are satisfied now. My poor child," he added, gently drawing her to sit down by him, and looking at her with the strange, solemn dispassionateness of dying people, who already begin to feel that they are of another sphere, — "my poor dear little girl! You were so pretty and so gay! I did you a great wrong in marrying you."

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"Oh, don't say that Horace," said my mother.

"It 's true, though," said my father. "With a richer and more prosperous man, you might have been blooming and happy yet. And this poor little man," said my father, stroking my head, — "perhaps fate may have something better in store for him. If I had had but the ghost of a chance, such as some men have, — some who do not value it, who only throw it away, — I might have been something. I had it in me; but no one will ever know it now. My life is a miserable, disgusting failure. Burn all my papers, Susy. Promise me that."

"I will do just what you say, Horace."

"And, Susy, when I am gone, don't let all the old gossips of Oldtown come to croak and croon over me, and make their stupid remarks on my helpless body. I hate country funerals. Don't make a vulgar show of me for their staring curiosity. Death is dreary enough at best, but I never could see any sense in aggravating its horrors by stupid funeral customs. Instead of dressing me in those ghostly, unnatural grave-clothes that people seem to delight in, just let me be buried in my clothes and let the last look my poor children have of me be as natural and familiar as possible. The last look of the dead ought to be sacred to one's friends alone. Promise, now, Susy," he said earnestly, "promise to do as I say."

"O Horace, I do promise, — I promise to do all you say. You know I always have."

"Yes, poor dear child, you have; you have been only too good for me."

"O Horace, how can you say so!" and my poor mother fell on my father's neck in a paroxysm of weeping.

But his great, bright eyes gathered no tears; they were fixed in an awful stillness. "My darling, you must not," he said tenderly, but with no answering emotion. "Calm yourself. And now, dear, as I am sure that to-morrow I

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shall not be with you, you must send for your mother to be with you to-night. You know she will come."

"Father," said I earnestly, "where are you going?"

"Where?" said he, looking at me with his clear, mournful eyes. "God knows, my son. I do not. It ought to be enough for me that God does know."

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CHAPTER III

MY GRANDMOTHER

"Now, Horace," said my mother, "you must run right up to your grandfather's, and tell your grandmother to come down and stay with us to-night; and you and Bill must stay there."

Bill, my brother, was a year or two older than I was; far more healthy, and consequently, perhaps, far more noisy. At any rate, my mother was generally only too glad to give her consent to his going anywhere of a leisure afternoon which would keep him out of the house, while I was always retained as her own special waiter and messenger.

My father had a partiality for me, because I was early an apt reader, and was fond of the quiet of his study and his books. He used to take pride and pleasure in hearing me read, which I did with more fluency and understanding than many children of twice my age; and thus it happened that, while Bill was off roaming in the woods this sunny autumn afternoon, I was the attendant and waiter in the sick-room. My little soul was oppressed and sorrowful, and so the message that sent me to my grandmother was a very welcome one, for my grandmother was, in my view, a tower of strength and deliverance. My mother was, as I have said, a frail, mournful, little, discouraged woman; but my grandmother belonged to that tribe of strong-backed, energetic, martial mothers in Israel, who brought to our life in America the vigorous bone and muscle and hearty blood of the yeomanry of Old England. She was

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a valiant old soul, who fearlessly took any bull in life by the horns, and was ready to shake him into decorum.

My grandfather, a well-to-do farmer, was one of the chief magnates of the village, and carried on a large farm and certain mills at the other end of it. The great old-fashioned farmhouse where they lived was at some distance from my father's cottage, right on the banks of that brown, sparkling, clear stream I have spoken of.

My grandfather was a serene, moderate, quiet man, upward of sixty, with an affable word and a smile for everybody, — a man of easy habits, never discomposed, and never in a hurry, who had a comfortable faith that somehow or other the affairs of this world in general, and his own in particular, would turn out all right, without much seeing to on his part.

My grandmother, on the contrary, was one of those wide-awake, earnest, active natures, whose days were hardly ever long enough for all that she felt needed to be done and attended to. She had very positive opinions on every subject, and was not at all backward in the forcible and vigorous expression of them; and evidently considering the apostolic gift of exhortation as having come straight down to her, she failed not to use it for the benefit of all whom it might concern.

Oldtown had in many respects a peculiar sort of society. The Indian tribe that once had been settled in its vicinity had left upon the place the tradition of a sort of wandering, gypsy, tramping life, so that there was in the town an unusual number of that roving, uncertain class of people, who are always falling into want, and needing to be helped, hanging like a tattered fringe on the thrifty and well-kept petticoat of New England society.

The traditions of tenderness, pity, and indulgence which the apostle Eliot had inwrought into the people of his day in regard to the Indians had descended through all the

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families, and given to that roving people certain established rights in every household, which in those days no one ever thought of disowning. The wandering Indian was never denied a good meal, a seat by the kitchen fire, a mug of cider, and a bed in the barn. My grandfather, out of his ample apple-orchard, always made one hogshead of cider which was called the Indian hogshead, and which was known to be always on tap for them; and my grandmother not only gave them food, but more than once would provide them with blankets, and allow them to lie down and sleep by her great kitchen fire. In those days New England was such a well-watched and schooled and catechised community, and so innocent in the general tone of its society, that in the rural villages no one ever locked the house doors of a night. I have lain awake many a night hearing the notes of the whippoorwills and the frogs, and listening to the sighing of the breeze, as it came through the great wide-open front door of the house, and swept up the staircase. Nobody ever thought of being afraid that the tramper whom he left asleep on the kitchen floor would rouse up in the night and rob the house. In fact, the poor vagrants were themselves tolerably innocent, not being guilty of very many sins darker than occasional drunkenness and habitual unthrift. They were a simple, silly, jolly set of rovers, partly Indian and partly whites who had fallen into Indian habits, who told stories, made baskets, drank cider, and raised puppies, of which they generally carried a supply in their wanderings, and from which came forth in due time an ample supply of those yellow dogs of old, one of whom was a standing member of every well-regulated New England family. Your yellow dog had an important part to act in life, as much as any of his masters. He lay in the kitchen door and barked properly at everything that went by. He went out with the children when they went roving in the woods Saturday afternoon, and was always on

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hand with a sober face to patter on his four solemn paws behind the farm-wagon as it went to meeting of a Sunday morning. And in meeting, who can say what an infinite fund of consolation their yellow, honest faces and great, soft eyes were to the children tired of the sermon, but greatly consoled by getting a sly opportunity to stroke Bose's yellow back? How many little eyes twinkled sympathetically through the slats of the high-backed pews, as the tick of their paws up and down the broad aisle announced that they were treating themselves to that meditative locomotion allowed to good dogs in sermon-time!

Surrounded by just such a community as I have described, my grandmother's gifts never became rusty for want of exercise. Somebody always needed straightening up and attending to. Somebody was to be exhorted, rebuked, or admonished, with all long-suffering and doctrine; and it was cheering to behold, after years of labors that had appeared to produce no very brilliant results on her disciples, how hale and vigorous her faith yet remained in the power of talking to people. She seemed to consider that evil-doers fell into sins and evils of all sorts merely for want of somebody to talk to them, and would fly at some poor, idle, loafing, shiftless object who staggered past her house from the tavern, with the same earnestness and zeal for the fortieth time as if she had not exhorted him vainly for the thirty-nine before.

In fact, on this very Saturday afternoon, as I was coming down the hill, whence I could see the mill and farm-house, I caught sight of her standing in the door, with cap-border erect, and vigorous gesticulation, upbraiding a poor miserable dog commonly called Uncle Eph, who stood swaying on the bridge, holding himself up by the rails with drunken gravity, only answering her expostulations by shaking his trembling fist at her, irreverently replying in every pause of her expostulation, "You — darned — old sheep you!"

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"I do wonder now, mother, that you can't let Uncle Eph alone," said my Aunt Lois, who was washing up the kitchen floor behind her. "What earthly good does it do to be talking to him? He always has drank, and always will."

"I can't help it," quoth my grandmother; "it 's a shame to him, and his wife lying there down with rheumatism. I don't see how folks can do so."

"And I don't see as it 's any of our business," said Aunt Lois. "What is it to us? We are not our brother's keeper."

"Well, it was Cain that said that to begin with," said my grandmother; "and I think it 's the spirit of Cain not to care what becomes of our neighbors!"

"I can't help it if it is. I don't see the use of fussing and caring about what you can't help. But there comes Horace Holyoke, to be sure. I suppose, mother, you 're sent for; I've been expecting it all along. Stand still there!" she called to me as I approached the door, "and don't come in to track my floor."

I stood without the door, therefore, and delivered my message; and my grandmother promptly turned into her own bedroom adjoining the kitchen, to make herself ready to go. I stood without the door, humbly waiting Aunt Lois's permission to enter the house.

"Well," said Aunt Lois, "I suppose we 've got to have both boys down here to-night. They 've got to come here, I suppose, and we may as well have 'em first as last. It 's just what I told Susy, when she would marry Horace Holyoke. I saw it just as plain as I see it now, that we should have to take care of 'em. It 's aggravating, because Susy neglected her opportunities. She might have been Mrs. Captain Shawmut, and had her carriage and horses, if she 'd only been a mind to."

"But," said my Aunt Keziah, who sat by the chimney,

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knitting, — "but if she could n't love Captain Shawmut, and *did* love Horace Holyoke" —

"Fiddlestick about that. Susy would 'a' loved him well enough if she 'd 'a' married him. She 'd 'a' loved anybody that she married well enough, — she 's one of the kind; and he 's turned out a very rich man, just as I told her. Susy was the only handsome one in our family, and she might have done something with herself if she 'd had sense."

"For my part," said Aunt Keziah, "I can't blame people for following their hearts. I never saw the money yet that would 'a' tempted me to marry the man I did n't love."

Poor Aunt Keziah had the reputation of being, on the whole, about the homeliest woman in Oldtown. She was fat and ill-shapen and clumsy, with a pale, greenish tinge to her complexion, watery, whitish-blue eyes, very rough thin hair, and ragged, scrubby eyebrows. Nature had been peculiarly unkind to her; but far within her ill-favored body she had the most exalted and romantic conceptions. She was fond of reading Young's Night Thoughts, Mrs. Rowe's Meditations, and Sir Charles Grandison, and always came out strong on the immaterial and sentimental side of every question. She had the most exalted ideas of a lofty, disinterested devotion, which she, poor soul! kept always simmering on a secret altar, ready to bestow on some ideal hero, if ever he should call for it. But, alas! her want of external graces prevented any such application. The princess was enchanted behind a hedge of ragged and unsightly thorns.

She had been my mother's aid and confidante in her love affair, and was therefore regarded with a suppressed displeasure by Aunt Lois, who rejoined, smartly: "I don't think, Kezzy, that you are likely to be tempted with offers of any sort; but Susy did have 'em — plenty of 'em, —

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and took Horace Holyoke when she might 'a' done better. Consequence is, we 've got to take her and her children home and take care of 'em. It 's just our luck. Your poor folks are the ones that are sure to have children, — the less they have to give 'em, the more they have. I think, for my part, that people that can't provide for children ought not to have 'em. Susy 's no more fit to bring up those boys than a white kitten. There never was a great deal to Susy," added Aunt Lois, reflectively, as, having finished the ablution of the floor, she took the dish of white sand to sand it.

"Well, for my part," said Aunt Kezzy, "I don't blame Susy a mite. Horace Holyoke was a handsome man, and the Holyokes are a good family. Why, his grandfather was a minister, and Horace certainly was a man of talents. Parson Lothrop said, if he 'd 'a' had early advantages, there were few men would have surpassed him. If he 'd only been able to go to college."

"And why was n't he able to go to college? Because he must needs get married. Now, when people set out to do a thing, I like to see 'em do it. If he 'd 'a' let Susy alone and gone to college, I dare say he might have been distinguished, and all that. I would n't have had the least objection. But no, nothing would do but he must get married, and have two boys, and then study himself into his grave, and leave 'em to us to take care of."

"Well, now, Lois," said my grandmother, coming out with her bonnet on, and her gold-headed cane in her hand, "if I were you, I would n't talk so. What do you always want to fight Providence for?"

"Providence!" said my Aunt Lois, with a sniff. "I don't call it Providence. I guess, if folks would behave themselves, Providence would let them alone."

"Why, everything is ordered and foreordained," said Aunt Keziah.

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"Besides that," said my grandmother, setting down her stick hard on the floor, "there 's no use in such talk, Lois. What 's done 's done; and if the Lord let it be done, we may. We can't always make people do as we would. There 's no use in being dragged through the world like a dog under a cart, hanging back and yelping. What we must do, we may as well do willingly, — as well walk as be dragged. Now we 've got Susy and her children to take care of, and let 's do it. They 've got to come here, and they shall come, — should come if there were forty-eleven more of 'em than there be, — so now you just shut up."

"Who said they should n't come?" said Aunt Lois. "I want to know now if I have n't moved out of the front room and gone into the little back chamber, and scoured up every inch of that front-room chamber on my hands and knees, and brought down the old trundle-bed out of the garret and cleaned it up, on purpose to be all ready for Susy and those children. If I have n't worked hard for them, I 'd like to have any one tell me; and I don't see, for my part, why I should be scolded."

"She was n't scolding you, Lois," said Aunt Keziah, pacifically.

"She was, too; and I never open my mouth," said Lois, in an aggrieved tone, "that you all don't come down on me. I 'm sure I don't see the harm of wishing Susy had married a man that could 'a' provided for her; but some folks feel so rich, nothing comes amiss with 'em. I suppose we are able to send both boys to college, and keep 'em like gentlemen, are n't we?"

My grandmother had not had the benefit of this last volley, as she prudently left the house the moment she had delivered herself of her reproof to Aunt Lois.

I was listening at the door with a troubled spirit, gathering from the conversation that my father and mother, somehow, had been improperly conducted people, and that

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I and my brother Bill had no business to have been born, and that our presence on the earth was, somehow or other, of the nature of an impertinence, making everybody a vast deal of trouble. I could not bear to go in; and as I saw my grandmother's stately steppings in the distance, I ran after her as fast as my little bare feet could patter, and seized fast hold of her gown with the same feeling that makes a chicken run under a hen.

"Why, Horace," said my grandmother, "why didn't you stay down at the house?"

"I didn't want to, grandma; please let me go with you."

"You mustn't mind Aunt Lois's talk, — she means well."

I snuffled and persisted, and so had my own way, for my grandmother was as soft-hearted to children as any of the meekest of the tribe who bear that revered name; and so she didn't mind it that I slid back into the shadows of my father's room, under cover of her ample skirts, and sat down disconsolate in a dark corner.

My grandmother brought to the sick-room a heavier responsibility than any mere earthly interest could have laid on her. With all her soul, which was a very large one, she was an earnest Puritan Calvinist. She had been nourished in the sayings and traditions of the Mathers and the Eliots, and all the first generation of the saints who had possessed Massachusetts. To these she had added the earnest study of the writings of Edwards and Bellamy, and others of those brave old thinkers who had broken up the crust of formalism and mechanical piety that was rapidly forming over the New England mind.

My remembrances of her are always as a reader. In her private chamber was always a table covered with books; and though performing personally the greater share of the labors of a large family, she never failed to have her quiet

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hour every afternoon for reading. History and biography she delighted in, but she followed with a keen relish the mazes of theology.

During the days of my father's health and vigor, he had one of those erratic, combative minds that delight in running logical tilts against received opinions, and was skilled in finding the weak point in all assertions. My grandmother, who believed with heart and soul and life-blood everything that she believed at all, had more than once been worsted by him in arguments where her inconsiderate heat outran her logic. These remembrances had pressed heavily on her soul during the time of his sickness, and she had more than once earnestly sought to bring him to her ways of thinking, — ways which to her view were the only possible or safe ones; but during his illness he had put such conversation from him with the quick, irritable impatience of a sore and wounded spirit.

On some natures theology operates as a subtle poison; and the New England theology in particular, with its intense clearness, its sharp-cut crystalline edges and needles of thought, has had in a peculiar degree the power of lacerating the nerves of the soul, and producing strange states of morbid horror and repulsion. The great unanswerable questions which must perplex every thinking soul that awakes to consciousness in this life are there posed with the severest and most appalling distinctness. These awful questions underlie all religions, — they belong as much to Deism as to the strictest orthodoxy, — in fact, they are a part of human perception and consciousness, since it cannot be denied that Nature in her teaching is a more tremendous and inexorable Calvinist than the Cambridge Platform, or any other platform that ever was invented.

But in New England society, where all poetic forms, all the draperies and accessories of religious ritual, have been rigidly and unsparingly retrenched, there was nothing

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between the soul and these austere and terrible problems; it was constantly and severely brought face to face with their infinite mystery. When my grandmother came into the room, it was with an evident and deep emotion working in her strong but plain features. She came up to the bed and grasped my father's hand earnestly.

"Well, mother," he said, "my time is come, and I have sent for you to put Susy and the children into your hands."

"I 'll take 'em and welcome, — you know that," said my grandmother heartily.

"God bless you, mother, — I do know it," he said; "but do have a special eye on poor little Horace. He has just my passion for books and study; and if he could be helped to get an education, he might do what I have failed to do. I leave him my books, — you will try and help him, mother?"

"Yes, my son, I will; but O my son, my son!" she added with trembling eagerness, "how is it with you now? Are you prepared for this great change?"

"Mother," he said in a solemn voice, yet speaking with a great effort, "no sane man ever comes to my age, and to this place where I lie, without thinking a great deal on all these things. I have thought, — God knows how earnestly, — but I cannot talk of it. We see through a glass darkly here. There, perhaps, we shall see clearly. You must be content to leave me where I leave myself, — in the hands of my Creator. He can do no wrong."

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CHAPTER IV

THE VILLAGE DO-NOTHING

"WAL, naow, Horace, don't ye cry so. Why, I 'm railly concerned for ye. Why, don't you s'pose your daddy 's better off? Why, sartin *I* do. Don't cry, there 's a good boy, now. I 'll give ye my jack-knife, now."

This was addressed to me the day after my father's death, while the preparations for the funeral hung like a pall over the house, and the terror of the last cold mystery, the tears of my mother, and a sort of bustling dreariness on the part of my aunts and grandmother, all conspired to bear down on my childish nerves with fearful power. It was a doctrine of those good old times, no less than of many in our present days, that a house invaded by death should be made as forlorn as hands could make it. It should be rendered as cold and stiff, as unnatural, as dead and corpse-like as possible, by closed shutters, looking-glasses pinned up in white sheets, and the locking up and hiding out of sight of any pleasant little familiar object which would be thought out of place in a sepulchre. This work had been driven through with unsparing vigor by Aunt Lois, who looked like one of the Fates as she remorselessly cleared away every little familiar object belonging to my father, and reduced every room to the shrouded stillness of a well-kept tomb.

Of course no one thought of looking after me. It was not the fashion of those days to think of children, if only they would take themselves off out of the way of the movements of the grown people; and so I had run out into the

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orchard back of the house, and, throwing myself down on my face under an apple-tree in the tall clover, I gave myself up to despair, and was sobbing aloud in a nervous paroxysm of agony, when these words were addressed to me. The speaker was a tall, shambling, loose-jointed man, with a long, thin visage, prominent watery blue eyes, very fluttering and seedy habiliments, who occupied the responsible position of first do-nothing-in-ordinary in our village of Oldtown, and as such I must introduce him to my readers' notice.

Every New England village, if you only think of it, must have its do-nothing as regularly as it has its schoolhouse or meeting-house. Nature is always wide-awake in the matter of compensation. Work, thrift, and industry are such an incessant steam-power in Yankee life, that society would burn itself out with intense friction were there not interposed here and there the lubricating power of a decided do-nothing, — a man who won't be hurried, and won't work, and will take his ease in his own way, in spite of the whole protest of his neighborhood to the contrary. And there is on the face of the whole earth no do-nothing whose softness, idleness, general inaptitude to labor, and everlasting, universal shiftlessness can compare with that of this worthy, as found in a brisk Yankee village.

Sam Lawson filled this post with ample honor in Oldtown. He was a fellow dear to the souls of all "us boys" in the village, because, from the special nature of his position, he never had anything more pressing to do than croon and gossip with us. He was ready to spend hours in tinkering a boy's jack-knife, or mending his skate, or start at the smallest notice to watch at a woodchuck's hole, or give incessant service in tending a dog's sprained paw. He was always on hand to go fishing with us on Saturday afternoons; and I have known him to sit hour after hour

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on the bank, surrounded by a troop of boys, baiting our hooks and taking off our fish. He was a soft-hearted old body, and the wrigglings and contortions of our prey used to disturb his repose so that it was a regular part of his work to kill the fish by breaking their necks when he took them from the hook.

"Why, lordy massy, boys," he would say, "I can't bear to see no kind o' critter in torment. These 'ere pouts ain't to blame for bein' fish, and ye ought to put 'em out of their misery. Fish hes their rights as well as any on us."

Nobody but Sam would have thought of poking through the high grass and clover on our back lot to look me up, as I lay sobbing under the old apple-tree, the most insignificant little atom of misery that ever bewailed the inevitable.

Sam was of respectable family, and not destitute of education. He was an expert in at least five or six different kinds of handicraft, in all of which he had been pronounced by the knowing ones to be a capable workman, "if only he would stick to it. He had a blacksmith's shop, where, when the fit was on him, he would shoe a horse better than any man in the county. No one could supply a missing screw, or apply a timely brace, with more adroitness. He could mend cracked china so as to be almost as good as new; he could use carpenter's tools as well as a born carpenter, and would doctor a rheumatic door or a shaky window better than half the professional artisans in wood. No man could put a refractory clock to rights with more ingenuity than Sam, — that is, if you would give him his time to be about it.

I shall never forget the wrath and dismay which he roused in my Aunt Lois's mind by the leisurely way in which, after having taken our own venerable kitchen clock to pieces, and strewn the fragments all over the kitchen, he would roost over it in endless incubation, telling stories,

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entering into long-winded theological discussions, smoking pipes, and giving histories of all the other clocks in Oldtown, with occasional memoirs of those in Needmore, the North Parish, and Podunk, as placidly indifferent to all her volleys of sarcasm and contempt, her stinging expostulations and philippics, as the sailing old moon is to the frisky, animated barking of some puppy dog of earth.

"Why, ye see, Miss Lois," he would say, "clocks can't be druv; that 's jest what they can't. Some things can be druv, and then agin some things can't, and clocks is that kind. They 's jest got to be humored. Now this 'ere 's a 'mazin' good clock; give me my time on it, and I 'll have it so 't will keep straight on to the Millennium."

"Millennium!" says Aunt Lois, with a snort of infinite contempt.

"Yes, the Millennium," says Sam, letting fall his work in a contemplative manner. "That 'ere 's an interestin' topic now. Parson Lothrop, he don't think the Millennium will last a thousand years. What 's your 'pinion on that pint, Miss Lois?"

"My opinion is," said Aunt Lois, in her most nipping tones, "that if folks don't mind their own business, and do with their might what their hand finds to do, the Millennium won't come at all."

"Wal, you see, Miss Lois, it 's just here, — one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

"I should think you thought a day was a thousand years, the way you work," said Aunt Lois.

"Wal," says Sam, sitting down with his back to his desperate litter of wheels, weights, and pendulums, and meditatively caressing his knee as he watched the sailing clouds in abstract meditation, "ye see, ef a thing 's ordained, why it 's got to be, ef you don't lift a finger. That 'ere 's *so*, now, ain't it?"

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"Sam Lawson, you are about the most aggravating creature I ever had to do with. Here you 've got our clock all to pieces, and have been keeping up a perfect hurrah's nest in our kitchen for three days, and there you sit maundering and talking with your back to your work, fussin' about the Millennium, which is none of your business, or mine, as I know of! Do either put that clock together or let it alone!"

"Don't you be a grain uneasy, Miss Lois. Why, I 'll have your clock all right in the end, but I can't be druv. Wal, I guess I 'll take another spell on 't to-morrow or Friday."

Poor Aunt Lois, horror-stricken, but seeing herself actually in the hands of the imperturbable enemy, now essayed the task of conciliation. "Now do, Lawson, just finish up this job, and I 'll pay you down, right on the spot; and you need the money."

"I 'd like to 'blige ye, Miss Lois; but ye see money ain't everything in this world. Ef I work tew long on one thing, my mind kind o' gives out, ye see; and besides, I 've got some 'sponsibilities to 'tend to. There 's Mrs. Captain Brown, she made me promise to come to-day and look at the nose o' that 'ere silver teapot o' her'n; it 's kind o' sprung a leak. And then I 'greed to split a little oven-wood for the Widdah Pedee, that lives up on the Shelburn road. Must visit the widdahs in their affliction, Scriptur' says. And then there 's Hepsy: she 's allers a-castin' it up at me that I don't do nothing for her and the chil'en; but then, lordy massy, Hepsy hain't no sort o' patience. Why, jest this mornin' I was a-tellin' her to count up her marcies, and I 'clare for 't if I did n't think she 'd a throwed the tongs at me. That 'ere woman's temper railly makes me consarned. Wal, good day, Miss Lois. I 'll be along again to-morrow or Friday, or the first o' next week." And away he went with long, loose strides

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down the village street, while the leisurely wail of an old fuguing tune floated back after him, —

"Thy years are an
Etarnal day,
Thy years are an
Etarnal day."

"An eternal torment," said Aunt Lois, with a snap. "I 'm sure, if there 's a mortal creature on this earth that I pity, it 's Hepsy Lawson. Folks talk about her scolding, — that Sam Lawson is enough to make the saints in Heaven fall from grace. And you can't *do* anything with him; it 's like charging bayonet into a woolsack."

Now, the Hepsy thus spoken of was the luckless woman whom Sam's easy temper, and a certain youthful reputation for being a capable fellow, had led years before into the snares of matrimony with him, in consequence of which she was encumbered with the bringing up of six children on very short rations. She was a gnarly, compact, efficient little pepper-box of a woman, with snapping black eyes, pale cheeks, and a mouth always at half-cock, ready to go off with some sharp crack of reproof at the shoreless, bottomless, and tideless inefficiency of her husband. It seemed to be one of those facts of existence that she could not get used to, nor find anywhere in her brisk, fiery little body a grain of cool resignation for. Day after day she fought it with as bitter and intense a vigor, and with as much freshness of objurgation, as if it had come upon her for the first time, — just as a sharp, wiry little terrier will bark and bark from day to day, with never-ceasing pertinacity, into an empty squirrel-hole. She seemed to have no power within her to receive and assimilate the great truth that her husband was essentially, and was to be, and always would be, only a do-nothing.

Poor Hepsy was herself quite as essentially a do-something, — an early-rising, bustling, driving, neat, efficient,

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capable little body, — who contrived, by going out to day's works, — washing, scrubbing, cleaning, — by making vests for the tailor, or closing and binding shoes for the shoemaker, by hoeing corn and potatoes in the garden at most unseasonable hours, actually to find bread to put into the mouths of the six young ravens aforesaid, and to clothe them decently. This might all do very well; but when Sam, who believed with all his heart in the modern doctrines of woman's rights so far as to have no sort of objection to Hepsy's sawing wood or hoeing potatoes if she chose, would make the small degree of decency and prosperity the family had attained by these means a text on which to preach resignation, cheerfulness, and submission, then Hepsy's last cobweb of patience gave out, and she often became, for the moment, really dangerous, so that Sam would be obliged to plunge hastily out of doors to avoid a strictly personal encounter.

It was not to be denied that poor Hepsy really was a scold, in the strong old Saxon acceptation of the word. She had fought life single-handed, tooth and nail, with all the ferocity of outraged sensibilities, and had come out of the fight scratched and disheveled, with few womanly graces. The good wives of the village, versed in the outs and ins of their neighbors' affairs, while they admitted that Sam was not all he should be, would sometimes roll up the whites of their eyes mysteriously, and say, "But then, poor man, what could you expect when he has n't a happy home? Hepsy's temper is, you know," etc., etc.

The fact is, that Sam's softly easy temper and habits of miscellaneous handiness caused him to have a warm corner in most of the households. No mothers ever are very hard on a man who always pleases the children; and every one knows the welcome of a universal gossip, who carries round a district a wallet of choice bits of neighborhood information.

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Now Sam knew everything about everybody. He could tell Mrs. Major Broad just what Lady Lothrop gave for her best parlor carpet, that was brought over from England, and just on what occasions she used the big silver tankard, and on what they were content with the little one, and how many pairs of long silk stockings the minister had, and how many rows of stitching there were on the shoulders of his Sunday shirts. He knew just all that was in Deacon Badger's best room, and how many silver table-spoons and teaspoons graced the beaufet in the corner; and when each of his daughters was born, and just how Miss Susy came to marry as she did, and who wanted to marry her and could n't. He knew just the cost of Major Broad's scarlet cloak and shoe-buckles, and how Mrs. Major had a real *Ingy* shawl up in her "camphire" trunk, that cost nigh as much as Lady Lothrop's. Nobody had made love, or married, or had children born, or been buried, since Sam was able to perambulate the country, without his informing himself minutely of every available particular; and his unfathomable knowledge on these subjects was an unfailing source of popularity.

Besides this, Sam was endowed with no end of idle accomplishments. His indolence was precisely of a turn that enjoyed the excitement of an occasional odd bit of work with which he had clearly no concern, and which had no sort of tendency toward his own support or that of his family. Something so far out of the line of practical utility as to be in a manner an artistic labor would awaken all the energies of his soul. His shop was a perfect infirmary for decayed articles of *vertu* from all the houses for miles around. Cracked china, lame teapots, broken shoe-buckles, rickety tongs, and decrepit fire-irons, all stood in melancholy proximity, awaiting Sam's happy hours of inspiration; and he was always happy to sit down and have a long, strictly confidential conversation concerning any of

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these with the owner, especially if Hepsy were gone out washing, or on any other work which kept her at a safe distance.

Sam could shave and cut hair as neatly as any barber, and was always in demand up and down the country to render these offices to the sick. He was ready to go for miles to watch with invalids, and a very acceptable watcher he made, beguiling the night hours with endless stories and legends. He was also an expert in psalmody, having in his youth been the pride of the village singing-school. In those days he could perform reputably on the bass-viol in the choir of a Sunday with a dolefulness and solemnity of demeanor in the highest degree edifying, — though he was equally ready of a week-evening in scraping on a brisk little fiddle, if any of the thoughtless ones wanted a performer at a husking or a quilting frolic. Sam's obligingness was many-sided, and he was equally prepared at any moment to raise a funeral psalm or whistle the time of a double-shuffle.

But the more particular delight of Sam's heart was in funerals. He would walk miles on hearing the news of a dangerous illness, and sit roosting on the fence of the premises, delighted to gossip over the particulars, but ready to come down at any moment to do any of the odd turns which sickness in a family makes necessary; and when the last earthly scene was over, Sam was more than ready to render those final offices from which the more nervous and fastidious shrink, but in which he took almost a professional pride.

The business of an undertaker is a refinement of modern civilization. In simple old days neighbors fell into one another's hands for all the last wants of our poor mortality; and there were men and women of note who took a particular and solemn pride in these mournful offices. Sam had in fact been up all night in our house, and having set

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me up in the clover, and comforted me with a jack-knife, he proceeded to inform me of the particulars.

"Why, ye see, Horace, I ben up with 'em pretty much all night; and I laid yer father out myself, and I never see a better-lookin' corpse. It 's a 'mazin' pity your daddy hed such feelin's 'bout havin' people come to look at him, 'cause he does look beautiful, and it 's been a long time since we 've had a funeral, anyway, and everybody was expectin' to come to his'n, and they 'll all be dissipinted if the corpse ain't show'd; but then, lordy massy, folks ought n't to think hard on 't ef folks hes their own way 'bout their own funeral. That 'ere 's what I 've been a-tellin' on 'em all, over to the tavern and round to the store. Why, you never see such a talk as there was about it. There was Aunt Sally Morse, and Betsey and Patsy Sawin, and Mis' Zeruiah Bacon, come over early to look at the corpse, and when they was n't let in, you never heerd sich a jawin'. Betsey and Patsy Sawin said that they allers suspected your father was an infidel, or some sich, and now they was clear; and Aunt Sally, she asked who made his shroud, and when she heerd there was n't to be none, he was laid out in his clothes, she said she never heerd such unchristian doin's, — that she always had heerd he had strange opinions, but she never thought it would come to that."

"My father is n't an infidel, and I wish I could kill 'em for talking so," said I, clenching my jack-knife in my small fist, and feeling myself shake with passion.

"Wal, wal, I kind o' spoke up to 'em about it. I was n't a-goin' to hear no sich jaw; and says I, 'I think ef there is anybody that knows what 's what about funerals I 'm the man, for I don't s'pose there 's a man in the county that 's laid out more folks, and set up with more corpses, and ben sent for fur and near, than I have; and my opinion is that mourners must always follow the last

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directions gi'n to 'em by the person. Ef a man has n't a right to have the say about his own body, what hes he a right to?' Wal, they said that it was putty well of me to talk so, when I had the privilege of sittin' up with him, and seein' all that was to be seen. 'Lordy massy,' says I, 'I don't see why ye need envi me; 't ain't my fault that folks thinks it 's agreeable to have me round. As to bein' buried in his clothes, why, lordy massy, 't ain't nothin' so extraordinary. In the old country great folks is very often laid out in their clothes. 'Member, when I was a boy, old Mr. Sanger, the minister in Deerbrook, was laid out in his gown and bands, with a Bible in his hands, and he looked as nateral as a pictur. I was at Parson Rider's funeral, down to Wrentham. He was laid out in white flannel. But then there was old Captain Bigelow, down to the Pint there, he was laid out regular in his rigimentals, jest as he wore 'em in the war, epaulets and all.' Wal now, Horace, your daddy looks jest as peaceful as a psalm-tune. Now, you don't know, — jest as nateral as if he 'd only jest gone to sleep. So ye may set your heart at rest 'bout him."

It was one of those beautiful serene days of October, when the earth lies as bright and still as anything one can dream of in the New Jerusalem, and Sam's homely expressions of sympathy had quieted me somewhat. Sam, tired of his discourse, lay back in the clover, with his hands under his head, and went on with his moralizing.

"Lordy massy, Horace, to think on't, — it 's so kind o' solemnizin'! It 's one's turn to-day, and another's to-morrow. We never know when our turn 'll come." And Sam raised a favorite stave, —

> "And must these active limbs of mine
> Lie moulderin' in the clay?"

"Active limbs! I guess so!" said a sharp voice, which came through the clover-heads like the crack of a rifle.

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"Well, I've found you at last. Here you be, Sam Lawson, lyin' flat on your back at eleven o'clock in the morning, and not a potato dug, and not a stick of wood cut to get dinner with; and I won't cut no more if we never have dinner. It's no use a-humorin' you, — doin' your work for you. The more I do, the more I may do; so come home, won't you?"

"Lordy massy, Hepsy," said Sam, slowly erecting himself out of the grass, and staring at her with white eyes, "you don't ought to talk so. I ain't to blame. I hed to sit up with Mr. Holyoke all night, and help 'em lay him out at four o'clock this mornin'."

"You're always everywhere but where you've business to be," said Hepsy; "and helpin' and doin' for everybody but your own. For my part, I think charity ought to begin at home. You're everywhere, up and down and round, — over to Shelbun, down to Podunk, up to North Parish; and here Abram and Kiah Stebbins have been waitin' all the morning with a horse they brought all the way from Boston to get you to shoe."

"Wal now, that 'ere shows they know what's what. I told Kiah that ef they'd bring that 'ere hoss to me I'd 'tend to his huffs."

"And be off lying in the mowing, like a patridge, when they come after ye. That's one way to do business," said Hepsy.

"Hepsy, I was just a miditatin'. Ef we don't miditate sometimes on all these 'ere things, it'll be wus for us by and by."

"Meditate! I'll help your meditations in a way you won't like, if you don't look out. So now you come home, and stop your meditatin', and go to doin' somethin'. I told 'em to come back this afternoon, and I'd have you on the spot if 't was a possible thing," said the very practical Hepsy, laying firm hold of Sam's unresisting arm, and leading him away captive.

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I stole into the darkened, silent room where my father had lain so long. Its desolate neatness struck a chill to my heart. Not even a bottle remained of the many familiar ones that used to cover the stand and the mantelpiece; but he, lying in his threadbare Sunday coat, looked to me as I had often seen him in later days, when he had come from school exhausted, and fallen asleep on the bed. I crept to his side and nestled down on the floor as quietly as a dog lies down by the side of his master.

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CHAPTER V

THE OLD MEETING-HOUSE

THE next day was the funeral, and I have little remembrance in it of anything but what was dreary. Our Puritan ancestors, in the decision of their reaction from a dead formalism, had swept away from the solemn crises of life every symbolic expression; and this severe bareness and rigid restriction were nowhere more striking than in funeral services, as conducted in these early times in Massachusetts.

There was at the house of mourning simply a prayer, nothing more; and then the procession of relatives, friends, and townspeople walked silently to the grave, where, without text, prayer, or hymn, the dust was forever given to its fellow-dust. The heavy thud of the clods on the coffin, the rattling of spades, and the fall of the earth, were the only voices that spoke in that final scene. Yet that austere stillness was not without its majesty, since it might be interpreted, not as the silence of indifference, but as the stillness of those whose thoughts are too mighty for words. It was the silence of the unutterable. From the grave my mother and her two boys were conducted to my grandfather's house, — the asylum ever ready for the widowed daughter.

The next day after was Sunday, and a Sunday full of importance in the view of Aunt Lois, Aunt Keziah, and, in fact, of every one in the family. It was the custom, on the first Sabbath after a bereavement, for the whole family circle to be present together in church, to request, in a formal note, the prayers of the congregation that the recent

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death might be sanctified to them. It was a point of honor for all family connections to be present at this service, even though they should not attend the funeral; and my Uncle Bill, a young Sophomore in Cambridge College, had come down duly to be with us on the occasion. He was a joyous, spirited, jolly, rollicking young fellow, not in the slightest degree given to funereal reflections, and his presence in the house always brought a certain busy cheerfulness which I felt to lighten my darkness.

One thing certainly had a tendency in that direction, which was that Aunt Lois was always perceptibly ameliorated by Uncle Bill's presence. Her sharp, spare features wore a relaxed and smiling aspect, her eyes had a softer light, and she belied her own frequent disclaimer, that she never had any beauty, by looking almost handsome.

Poor Aunt Lois! I am afraid my reader will not do justice to her worth by the specimens of her ways and words which I have given. Any one that has ever pricked his fingers in trying to force open a chestnut-bur may perhaps have moralized at the satin lining, so smooth and soft, that lies inside of that sharpness. It is an emblem of a kind of nature very frequent in New England, where the best and kindest and most desirable of traits are enveloped in an outside wrapping of sharp austerity.

No person rendered more deeds of kindness in the family and neighborhood than Aunt Lois. She indeed bore the cares of the whole family on her heart; she watched and prayed and fretted and scolded for all. Had she cared less, she might perhaps have appeared more amiable. She invested herself, so to speak, in others; and it was vital to her happiness, not only that they should be happy, but that they should be happy precisely on her pattern and in her way. She had drawn out the whole family chart, and if she had only had power to make each one walk tractably in the path she foreordained, her sharp, thin face might

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have had a few less wrinkles. It seemed to her so perfectly evident that the ways she fixed upon for each one were ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, that she scarcely could have patience with Providence for allowing things to fall out in a way so entirely different from her designs.

Aunt Lois was a good Christian, but she made that particular mistake in repeating the Lord's Prayer which so many of us quite unconsciously do, — she always said, *My* will be done, instead of Thy will. Not in so many words, of course; it was the secret inner voice of her essential nature that spoke and said one thing, while her tongue said another. But then, who can be sure enough of himself in this matter, to cast the first stone at Aunt Lois?

It was the fashion of the Calvinistic preaching of that time to put the doctrine of absolute and unconditional submission to God in the most appalling forms, and to exercise the conscience with most severe suppositious tests. After many struggles and real agonies, Aunt Lois had brought herself to believe that she would be willing to resign her eternal salvation to the Divine glory; that she could consent to the eternal perdition of those on whom her heart was most particularly set, were it God's will; and thus her self-will, as she supposed, had been entirely annihilated, whereas it was only doubled back on itself, and ready to come out with tenfold intensity in the unsuspected little things of this life, where she looked less at Divine agency than human instrumentality. No law, as she supposed, required her to submit to people's acting foolishly in their worldly matters, particularly when she was able and willing to show them precisely how they ought to act.

Failing of a prosperous marriage for my mother, Aunt Lois's heart was next set upon a college education for my Uncle Bill, the youngest and brightest of the family. For this she toiled and economized in family labor, and eked it

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out by vest-making at the tailor's, and by shoe-binding at the shoemaker's, — all that she might have something to give to Bill for spending-money, to keep up his standing respectably in college. Her antagonistic attitude toward my brother and myself proceeded less from hardness of heart than from an anxious, worrying fear that we should trench on the funds that at present were so heavily taxed to bring Uncle Bill through college. Especially did she fear that my father had left me the legacy of his own ungratified desire for an education, and that my grandmother's indulgence and bountifulness might lead her to encourage me in some such expectations, and then where was the money to come from? Aunt Lois foresaw contingencies afar off. Not content with the cares of the present day and hour, she dived far into the future, and carried all sorts of imaginary loads that would come in supposititious cases. As the Christian by the eye of faith sees all sorts of possible good along the path of future duty, so she by the eye of cautiousness saw every possible future evil that could arise in every supposable contingency. Aunt Lois's friends often had particular reason to wish that she cared less for them, for then, perhaps, she might give them some peace. But nothing is so hopeless as your worthy domestic house-dog, every hair of whose fur bristles with watchfulness, and who barks at you incessantly from behind a most terrible intrenchment of faithful labors and loving-kindnesses heaped up on your behalf.

These dear good souls who wear their life out for you, have they not a right to scold you, and dictate to you, and tie up your liberty, and make your life a burden to you? If they have not, who has? If you complain, you break their worthy old hearts. They insist on the privilege of seeking your happiness by thwarting you in everything you want to do, and putting their will instead of yours in every step of your life.

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Between Aunt Lois and my father there had been that constant antagonism which is often perceptible between two human beings, each good enough in himself, but of a quality to act destructively upon the other. A satin vest and a nutmeg-grater are both perfectly harmless, and even worthy existences, but their close proximity on a jolting journey is not to be recommended.

My father never could bear my Aunt Lois in his house; and her presence had such an instant effect in developing all the combative element in him, that really the poor woman never saw him long enough under an agreeable aspect to enable her even to understand why my mother should regard him with affection; and it is not to be wondered at, therefore, that she was not a deep mourner at his death. She regarded her sister's love for my father as an unfortunate infatuation, and was more satisfied with the ways of Providence than she usually was, when its object was withdrawn.

It was according to all the laws of moral gravitation that, as soon as my father died, my mother became an obedient satellite in Aunt Lois's orbit. She was one of those dear, helpless little women, who, like flowers by the wayside, seem to be at the disposal of the first strong hand that wants to gather them. She was made to be ruled over; and so we all felt, this first Sunday morning that we had come home to be under the dominion of Aunt Lois. She put on my mother's mourning-bonnet and tied it under her meek, unresisting chin, turning her round and round to get views of her from different points, and arranging her ribbons and veil and pins as if she had been a lay figure going to exhibition; and then she tied our collars, and gave a final twitch to our jackets, and warned us not to pull out the pins from the crape bands on our new hats, nor to talk and look round in meeting, strengthening the caution with, "Just so sure as you do, there 's Mr. Israel

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Scran, the tithing-man, will come and take you and set you on the pulpit stairs."

Now Mr. Israel Scran on week-days was a rather jolly, secular-looking individual, who sat on the top of a barrel in his store, and told good stories; but Israel Scran on Sundays was a tithing-man, whose eyes were supposed to be as a flame of fire to search out little boys that played in meeting, and bring them to awful retribution. And I must say that I shook in my shoes at the very idea of his entering into judgment with me for any misdemeanor.

Going to church on the present occasion was rather a severe and awful ceremony to my childish mind, second only to the dreary horror of the time when we stood so dreadfully still around the grave, and heard those heavy clods thud upon the coffin. I ventured a timid inquiry of my mother as to what was going to be done there.

Aunt Lois took the word out of her mouth. "Now, Horace, hush your talk, and don't worry your mother. She 's going to put up a note to be prayed for to-day, and we are all going to join; so you be a good boy, and don't talk."

Being good was so frequently in those days represented to me as synonymous with keeping silence, that I screwed my little mouth up firmly as I walked along to the meeting-house, behind my mother, holding my brother Bill's hand, and spoke not a word, though he made several overtures towards conversation by informing me that he saw a chipmunk, and that if it was only Monday he 'd hit him smack; and also telling me that Sam Lawson had promised to go pout-fishing with us on Tuesday, with other boy temporalities of a nature equally worldly.

The meeting-house to which our steps were tending was one of those huge, shapeless, barn-like structures, which our fathers erected apparently as a part of that well-arranged system by which they avoided all resemblance to

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those fair, poetic ecclesiastical forms of the Old World, which seemed in their view as "garments spotted by the flesh."

The interior of it was revealed by the light of two staring rows of windows, which let in the glare of the summer sun, and which were so loosely framed, that, in wintry and windy weather, they rattled and shook, and poured in a perfect whirlwind of cold air, which disported itself over the shivering audience. It was a part of the theory of the times never to warm these buildings by a fire; and the legend runs that once in our meeting-house the communion was administered under a temperature which actually froze the sacred elements while they were being distributed. Many a remembrance of winter sessions in that old meeting-house rose to my mind, in which I sat with my poor dangling feet perfectly numb and paralyzed with cold, and blew my finger-ends to keep a little warmth in them, and yet I never thought of complaining; for everybody was there, — mother, aunts, grandmother, and all the town. We all sat and took our hardships in common, as a plain, necessary fact of existence.

Going to meeting, in that state of society into which I was born, was as necessary and inevitable a consequence of waking up on Sunday morning as eating one's breakfast. Nobody thought of staying away, — and, for that matter, nobody wanted to stay away. Our weekly life was simple, monotonous, and laborious; and the chance of seeing the whole neighborhood together in their best clothes on Sunday was a thing which, in the dearth of all other sources of amusement, appealed to the idlest and most unspiritual of loafers. They who did not care for the sermon or the prayers wanted to see Major Broad's scarlet coat and laced ruffles, and his wife's brocade dress, and the new bonnet which Lady Lothrop had just had sent up from Boston. Whoever had not seen these would be out of society for

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a week to come, and not be able to converse understandingly on the topics of the day.

The meeting on Sunday united in those days, as nearly as possible, the whole population of a town, — men, women, and children. There was then in a village but one fold and one shepherd, and long habit had made the tendency to this one central point so much a necessity to every one, that to stay away from "meetin'" for any reason whatever was always a secret source of uneasiness. I remember in my early days, sometimes when I had been left at home by reason of some of the transient ailments of childhood, how ghostly and supernatural the stillness of the whole house and village outside the meeting-house used to appear to me, how loudly the clock ticked and the flies buzzed down the window-pane, and how I listened in the breathless stillness to the distant psalm-singing, the solemn tones of the long prayer, and then to the monotone of the sermon, and then again to the closing echoes of the last hymn, and thought sadly, what if some day I should be left out, when all my relations and friends had gone to meeting in the New Jerusalem, and hear afar the music from the crystal walls.

As our Sunday gathering at meeting was a complete picture of the population of our village, I shall, as near as possible, daguerreotype our Sunday audience, as the best means of placing my readers in sympathy with the scene and actors of this history.

The arrangement of our house of worship in Oldtown was somewhat peculiar, owing to the fact of its having originally been built as a mission church for the Indians. The central portion of the house, usually appropriated to the best pews, was in ours devoted to them; and here were arranged benches of the simplest and most primitive form, on which were collected every Sunday the thin and wasted remnants of what once was a numerous and powerful tribe.

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There were four or five respectable Indian families, who owned comfortable farms in the neighborhood, and came to meeting in their farm-wagons, like any of their white neighbors.

Conspicuous among these, on the front bench, facing the pulpit, sat the Indian head-magistrate, Justice Waban, — tall and erect as an old pine-tree, and of a grave and reverend aspect. Next to him was seated the ecclesiastical superior of that portion of the congregation, Deacon Ephraim. Mild, intelligent, and devout, he was the perfect model of the praying Indian formed in the apostolic traditions of the good Eliot. By his side sat his wife, Keturah, who, though she had received Christian baptism, still retained in most respects the wild instincts and untamed passions of the savage. Though she attended church and allowed her children to be baptized, yet, in spite of minister, elder, and a tithing-man, she obstinately held on to the practice of many of her old heathen superstitions.

Old Keturah was one of the wonders of my childhood. She was spoken of among the gossips with a degree of awe, as one who possessed more knowledge than was good for her; and in thunder-storms and other convulsions of nature she would sit in her chimney-corner and chant her old Indian incantations to my mingled terror and delight. I remember distinctly three syllables that occurred very often, — "ah-mah-ga, ah-mah-ga," — sometimes pronounced in wild, plaintive tones, and sometimes in tones of menace and denunciation. In fact, a century before, Keturah must have had a hard time of it with her Christian neighbors; but our minister was a gentleman and a scholar, and only smiled benignly when certain elderly ladies brought him terrible stories of Keturah's proceedings.

Next to Keturah was seated Deborah Kummacher, an Indian woman, who had wisely forsaken the unprofitable gods of the wild forest, and taken to the Christian occupa-

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tion of fruit-growing, and kept in nice order a fruit farm near my grandfather's, where we children delighted to resort in the season, receiving from her presents of cherries, pears, peaches, or sweet apples, which she informed us she was always ready to give to good children who said their prayers and made their manners when they came into her house. Next behind her came Betty Poganut, Patty Pegan, and old Sarah Wonsamug, — hard-visaged, high-cheek-boned females, with snaky-black eyes, principally remarkable, in my mind, for the quantity of cider they could drink. I had a special reason to remember this, as my grandmother's house was their favorite resort, and drawing cider was always the work of the youngest boy.

Then there was Lem Sudock, a great, coarse, heavy-moulded Indian, with gigantic limbs and a savage face, but much in request for laying stone walls, digging wells, and other tasks for which mere physical strength was the chief requisite. Beside him was Dick Obscue, a dull, leering, lazy drinking old fellow, always as dry as an empty sponge, but with an endless capacity for imbibing. Dick was of a class which our modern civilization would never see inside of a church, though he was in his seat in our meeting-house as regularly as any of the deacons; but on week-days his principal employment seemed to be to perambulate the country, making stations of all the kitchen firesides, where he would tell stories, drink cider, and moralize, till the patience or cider-pitchers of his hosts ran dry, when he would rise up slowly, adjust his old straw hat, hitch up his dangling nether garments a little tighter, and, with a patronizing nod, say, "Wal, naow, 'f you can spare me I 'll go."

Besides our Indian population, we had also a few negroes, and a side gallery was appropriated to them. Prominent there was the stately form of old Boston Foodah, an African prince, who had been stolen from the coast of

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Guinea in early youth, and sold in Boston at some period of antiquity whereto the memory of man runneth not. All the Oldtown people, and their fathers and grandfathers, remembered old Boston just as he then existed, neither older nor younger. He was of a majestic stature, slender and proudly erect, and perfectly graceful in every movement, his woolly hair as white as the driven snow. He was servant to General Hull in the Revolutionary war, and at its close was presented by his master with a full suit of his military equipments, including three-cornered hat, with plume, epaulets, and sword. Three times a year, — at the spring training, the fall muster, and on Thanksgiving day, — Boston arrayed himself in full panoply, and walked forth a really striking and magnificent object. In the eyes of us boys, on these days, he was a hero, and he patronized us with a condescension which went to our hearts. His wife, Jinny, was a fat, roly-poly little body, delighting in red and yellow bonnets, who duly mustered into meeting a troop of black-eyed, fat, woolly-headed little negroes, whom she cuffed and disciplined during sermon-time with a matronly ferocity designed to show white folks that she was in earnest in their religious training. Near by was old Primus King, a gigantic, retired whaleman, black as a coal, with enormous hands and feet, universally in demand in all the region about as assistant in butchering operations.

Besides these, let me not forget dear, jolly old Cæsar, my grandfather's own negro, the most joyous creature on two feet. What could not Cæsar do? He could gobble like a turkey so perfectly as to deceive the most experienced old gobbler on the farm; he could crow so like a cock that all the cocks in the neighborhood would reply to him; he could mew like a cat, and bark like a dog; he could sing and fiddle, and dance the double-shuffle, and was *au fait* in all manner of jigs and hornpipes; and one need not wonder, therefore, that old Cæsar was hugged and caressed

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and lauded by me in my childhood as the most wonderful of men.

There were several other colored families, of less repute, who also found seats in the negro gallery. One of them was that of Aunt Nancy Prime, famous for making election-cake and ginger-pop, and who was sent for at all the great houses on occasions of high festivity, as learned in all mysteries relating to the confection of cakes and pies. A tight, trim, bustling body she, black and polished as ebony, smooth-spoken and respectful, and quite a favorite with everybody. Nancy had treated herself to an expensive luxury in the shape of a husband, — an idle, worthless mulatto man, who was owned as a slave in Boston. Nancy bought him by intense labors in spinning flax, but found him an undesirable acquisition, and was often heard to declare, in the bitterness of her soul, when he returned from his drinking bouts, that she should never buy another nigger, she knew. The only thing she gained by this matrimonial speculation was an abundant crop of noisy children, who, as she often declared, nearly wore the life out of her. I remember once, when I was on a visit to her cottage, while I sat regaling myself with a slice of cake, Nancy lifted the trap-door which went down into the cellar below. Forthwith the whole skirmishing tribe of little darkies, who had been rolling about the floor, seemed suddenly to unite in one coil, and, with a final flop, disappeared in the hole. Nancy gave a kick to the door, and down it went; when she exclaimed, with a sigh of exhausted patience, "Well, now then, I hope you 'll be still a minute, anyway!"

The houses of the colored people formed a little settlement by themselves in the north part of the village, where they lived on most amicable terms with all the inhabitants.

In the front gallery of the meeting-house, opposite the pulpit, was seated the choir of the church. The leader of

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our music was old Mump Morse, a giant of a man, in form not unlike a cider-hogshead, with a great round yellow head, and a voice like the rush of mighty winds, who was wont to boast that he could chord with thunder and lightning better than any man in the parish. Next to him came our friend Sam Lawson, whose distinguishing peculiarity it was that he could strike into any part where his voice seemed most needed; and he often showed the miscellaneous nature of his accomplishments by appearing as tenor, treble, or counter, successively, during the rendering of one psalm. If we consider that he also pitched the tunes with his pitch-pipe, and played on his bass-viol, we shall see increasing evidence of that versatility of genius for which he was distinguished.

Another principal bass-singer was old Joe Stedman, who asserted his democratic right to do just as he had a mind to by always appearing every Sunday in a clean leather apron of precisely the form he wore about his weekly work. Of course all the well-conducted upper classes were scandalized, and Joe was privately admonished of the impropriety, which greatly increased his satisfaction, and caused him to regard himself as a person of vast importance. It was reported that the minister had told him that there was more pride in his leather apron than in Captain Browne's scarlet cloak; but Joe settled the matter by declaring that the apron was a matter of conscience with him, and of course after that there was no more to be said. These leading characters, with a train of young men and maidens who practiced in the weekly singing-school, used to conduct the musical devout exercises much to their own satisfaction, if not always to that of our higher circle.

And now, having taken my readers through the lower classes in our meeting-house, I must, in order of climax, represent to them our higher orders. Social position was a thing in those days marked by lines whose precision and

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distinctness had not been blurred by the rough handling of democracy. Massachusetts was, in regard to the aroma and atmosphere of her early days, an aristocratic community. The seeds of democratic social equality lay as yet ungerminated in her soil. The State was a garden laid out with the old formal parallelograms and clipped hedges of princely courts and titled ranks, but sown with seeds of a new and rampant quality, which were destined to overgrow them all.

Even our little town had its court circle, its House of Lords and House of Commons, with all the etiquette and solemn observances thereto appertaining. At the head stood the minister and his wife, whose rank was expressed by the pew next the pulpit. Then came Captain Browne, a retired English merchant and ship-owner, who was reported to have ballasted himself with a substantial weight of worldly substance. Captain Browne was a tall, upright, florid man, a little on the shady side of life, but carrying his age with a cheerful greenness. His long, powdered locks hung in a well-tended queue down his back, and he wore a scarlet coat, with a white vest and stock, and small-clothes, while long silk stockings with knee and shoe buckles of the best paste, sparkling like real diamonds, completed his attire. His wife rustled by his side in brocade which might almost stand alone for stiffness, propped upon heels that gave a majestic altitude to her tall, thin figure.

Next came the pew of Miss Mehitable Rossiter, who, in right of being the only surviving member of the family of the former minister, was looked upon with reverence in Oldtown, and took rank decidedly in the Upper House, although a very restricted and limited income was expressed in the quality of her attire. Her Sunday suit in every article spoke of ages past, rather than of the present hour. Her laces were darned, though still they were laces; her satin gown had been turned and made over, till every possible capability of it was exhausted; and her one Sunday

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bonnet exhibited a power of coming out in fresh forms, with each revolving season, that was quite remarkable, particularly as each change was somewhat odder than the last. But still, as everybody knew that it was Miss Mehitable Rossiter, and no meaner person, her queer bonnets and dyed gowns were accepted as a part of those inexplicable dispensations of the Providence that watches over the higher classes, which are to be received by faith alone.

In the same pew with Miss Mehitable sat Squire Jones, once, in days of colonial rule, rejoicing in the dignity of Sheriff of the County. During the years of the Revolutionary war, he had mysteriously vanished from view, as many good Tories did; but now that the new social status was well established, he suddenly reappeared in the neighborhood, and took his place as an orderly citizen, unchallenged and unquestioned. It was enough that the Upper House received him. The minister gave him his hand, and Lady Lothrop courtesied to him, and called on his wife, and that, of course, settled the manner in which the parish were to behave; and, like an obedient flock, they all jumped the fence after their shepherd. Squire Jones, besides, was a well-formed, well-dressed man, who lived in a handsome style, and came to meeting in his own carriage; and these are social virtues not to be disregarded in any well-regulated community.

There were certain well-established ranks and orders in social position in Oldtown, which it is important that I should distinctly define. People who wore ruffles round their hands, and rode in their own coaches, and never performed any manual labor, might be said to constitute in Oldtown our House of Lords, — and they might all have been counted on two or three of my fingers. It was, in fact, confined to the personages already enumerated. There were the minister, Captain Browne, and Sheriff Jones.

But below these, yet associating with them on terms of

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strict equality, were a more numerous body of Commons, — men of substance and influence, but who tilled the earth with their own hands, or pursued some other active industrial calling.

Distinguished among these, sitting in the next pew to the Sheriff, was Major Broad, a practical farmer, who owned a large and thriving farm of the best New England type, and presented that true blending of the laboring man and the gentleman which is nowhere else found. He had received his military rank for meritorious services in the late Revolutionary war, and he came back to his native village with that indefinable improvement in air and manner which is given by the habits of military life. With us he owed great prestige to a certain personal resemblance to General Washington which he was asserted to have by one of our townsfolk, who had often seen him and the General on the same field, and who sent the word abroad in the town that whoever wanted to know how General Washington looked had only to look upon Major Broad. The Major was too much of a real man to betray the slightest consciousness of this advantage, but it invested him with an air of indefinable dignity in the eyes of all his neighbors, especially those of the lower ranks.

Next came my grandfather's family pew; and in our Oldtown House of Commons I should say that none stood higher than he. In his Sunday suit my grandfather was quite a well-made, handsome man. His face was marked by grave, shrewd reflection, and a certain gentle cast of humor, which rarely revealed itself even in a positive smile, and yet often made me feel as if he were quietly and interiorly smiling at his own thoughts. His well-brushed Sunday coat and small-clothes, his bright knee and shoe buckles, his long silk stockings, were all arranged with a trim neatness refreshing to behold. His hair, instead of being concealed by a wig, or powdered and tied in a queue,

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after the manner of the aristocracy, fell in long curls on his shoulders, and was a not unbecoming silvery frame to the placid picture of his face. He was a man by nature silent and retiring, indisposed to anything like hurry or tumult, rather easy and generously free in his business habits, and quietly sanguine in his expectations. In point of material possessions he was reputed well-to-do, as he owned a large farm and two mills, and conducted the business thereof with a quiet easiness which was often exceedingly provoking to my grandmother and Aunt Lois. No man was more popular in the neighborhood, and the confidence of his fellow-townsmen was yearly expressed in town-meeting by his reappointment to every office of trust which he could be induced to accept. He was justice of the peace, deacon of the church, selectman, — in short, enjoyed every spiritual and temporal office by the bestowal of which his fellow-men could express confidence in him. This present year, indeed, he bore the office of tithing-man, in association with Mr. Israel Scran. It had been thought that it would be a good thing, in order to check the increasing thoughtlessness of the rising generation in regard to Sunday-keeping, to enlist in this office an authority so much respected as Deacon Badger; but the manner in which he performed its duties was not edifying to the minds of strictly disposed people. The Deacon in his official capacity was expected to stalk forth at once as a terror to evil-doers, whereas he seemed to have no capacity for terrifying anybody. When a busy individual informed him that this or that young person was to be seen walking out in the fields, or picking flowers in their gardens of a Sabbath afternoon, the Deacon always placidly answered that he had n't seen them; from which the ill-disposed would infer that he looked another way, of set purpose, and the quiet internal smile that always illuminated the Deacon's face gave but too much color to this idea.

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In those days the great war of theology which has always divided New England was rife, and every man was marked and ruled as to his opinions, and the theologic lines passed even through the conjugal relation, which often, like everything else, had its Calvinistic and its Arminian side. My grandfather was an Arminian, while my grandmother was, as I have said, an earnest, ardent Calvinist. Many were the controversies I have overheard between them, in which the texts of Scripture flew thick and fast, until my grandfather at last would shut himself up in that final fortress of calm and smiling silence which is so provoking to feminine ardor. There intrenched, he would look out upon his assailants with a quiet, imperturbable good-humor which quite drove them to despair.

It was a mystery to my grandmother how a good man, as she knew my grandfather to be, could remain years unmoved in the very hearing of such unanswerable arguments as she had a thousand times brought up, and still, in the very evening of his days, go on laying his serene old head on an Arminian pillow! My grandfather was a specimen of that class of men who can walk amid the opinions of their day, encircled by a halo of serene and smiling individuality which quarrels with nobody, and, without shocking any one's prejudices, preserves intact the liberty of individual dissent. He silently went on thinking and doing exactly as he pleased, and as yet was always spoken of as the *good* Deacon. His calm, serene, benignant figure was a sort of benediction as he sat in his pew of a Sunday; and if he did not see the little boys that played, or, seeing them, only smilingly brought them to a sense of duty by passing them a head of fennel through the slats of the pews, still Deacon Badger was reckoned about the best man in the world.

By the side of my grandfather sat his eldest born, Uncle Jacob, a hale, thrifty young farmer, who, with his equally

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hale and thrifty wife, was settled on a well-kept farm at some distance from ours. Uncle Jacob was a genuine son of the soil, whose cheeks were ruddy as clover, and teeth as white as new milk. He had grown up on a farm, as quietly as a tree grows, and had never been ten miles from his birthplace. He was silent, contented, and industrious. He was in his place to be prayed for as one of a bereaved family, of course, this morning; but there was scarcely more capability of mourning in his plump, healthy body than there is in that of a well-fed, tranquil steer. But he took his weekly portion of religion kindly. It was the thing to do on Sunday, as much as making hay or digging potatoes on Monday. His wife by his side displayed no less the aspect of calm, respectable, well-to-do content. Her Sunday bonnet was without spot, her Sunday gown without wrinkle; and she had a great bunch of fennel in her pocket-handkerchief, which, from time to time, she imparted to us youngsters with a benevolent smile.

Far otherwise was the outward aspect of my grandmother's brother, Eliakim Sheril. He was a nervous, wiry, thin, dry little old man, every part of whose body appeared to be hung together by springs that were in constant vibration. He had small, keen black eyes, a thin, sharp hooked nose, which he was constantly buffeting, and blowing, and otherwise maltreating, in the fussy uneasiness which was the habit of the man.

Uncle 'Liakim was a man known as Uncle to all the village, — the kindest-souled, most untiringly benevolent, single-hearted old body that could be imagined; but his nervous activity was such as to have procured among the boys a slight change in the rendering of his name, which was always popularly given as Uncle Fliakim, and, still more abbreviated, Uncle Fly.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Sheril is?" says an inquirer at the door of my grandfather's mill.

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"If you want to find 'Liakim," says my grandfather, with his usual smile, "never go after him, — you 'll never catch him; but stand long enough on any one spot on earth, and he 's sure to go by."

Uncle 'Liakim had his own particular business, — the overseeing of a soap and candle factory; but, besides that, he had on his mind the business of everybody else in town, — the sorrows of every widow, the lonely fears of every spinster, the conversion of every reprobate, the orthodoxy of every minister, the manners and morals of all the parish, — all of which caused him to be up early and down late, and flying about confusedly at all hours, full of zeal, full of kindness, abounding in suggestions, asking questions the answers to which he could not stop to hear, making promises which he did not remember, and which got him into no end of trouble with people who did, telling secrets, and letting innumerable cats out of countless bags, to the dismay and affright of all reserved and well-conducted people. Uncle Fliakim, in fact, might be regarded in our village of Oldtown as a little brown pudding-stick that kept us in a perpetual stir. To be sure, it was a general stir of loving-kindness and good intentions, yet it did not always give unlimited satisfaction.

For instance, some of the more strictly disposed members of the congregation were scandalized that Uncle Fliakim, every stormy Sunday, nearly destroyed the solemnity of the long prayer by the officious zeal which he bestowed in getting sundry forlorn old maids, widows, and other desolate women to church. He had a horse of that immortal species well known in country villages, — made of whalebone and india-rubber, with a long neck, a hammer-head, and one blind eye, — and a wagon which rattled and tilted and clattered in every part, as if infected with a double portion of its owner's spirits; and, mounting in this, he would drive miles in the rain or the snow, all for the plea-

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sure of importing into the congregation those dry, forlorn, tremulous specimens of female mortality which abound in every village congregation.

Uncle Fliakim had been talked to on this subject, and duly admonished. The benevolence of his motives was allowed; but why, it was asked, must he always drive his wagon with a bang against the doorstep just as the congregation rose to the first prayer? It was a fact that the stillness which followed the words, "Let us pray," was too often broken by the thump of the wagon and the sound, "Whoa, whoa! take care, there!" from without, as Uncle Fly's blind steed rushed headlong against the meeting-house door, as if he were going straight in, wagon and all; and then there would be a further most unedifying giggle and titter of light-minded young men and damsels when Aunt Bathsheba Sawin and Aunt Jerusha Pettibone, in their rusty black crape bonnets, with their big black fans in their hands, slowly rustled and creaked into their seats, while the wagon and Uncle 'Liakim were heard giggiting away. Then the boys, if the tithing-man was not looking at them, would bet marbles whether the next load would be old Mother Chris and Phœbe Drury, or Hetty Walker and old Mother Hopestill Loker.

It was a great offense to all the stricter classes that Uncle Fly should demean his wagon by such an unedifying character as Mother Hopestill Loker; for, though her name intimated that she ought to have charity, still she was held no better than a publican and sinner; and good people in those days saw the same impropriety in such people having too much to do with reputable Christians that they used to years ago in a country called Palestine.

For all these reasons Uncle Fliakim was often dealt with as one of good intentions, but wanting the wisdom which is profitable to direct. One year his neighbors thought to employ his superfluous activity by appointing him tithing-

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man; and great indeed in this department were his zeal and activity; but it was soon found that the dear man's innocent sincerity of heart made him the prey of every village good-for-naught who chose to take him in. All the naughty boys in town were agog with expectancy when Joe Valentine declared, with a wink, that he 'd drive a team Sunday right by Uncle Fly's house, over to Hopkinton, with his full consent. Accordingly, the next Sunday he drove leisurely by, with a solemn face and a broad weed on his hat. Uncle Fly ran panting, half dressed, and threw himself distractedly on the neck of the horse. "My young friend, I cannot permit it. You must turn right back."

"My dear sir," said Joe, "have n't you heard that my mother is lying dead in Hopkinton at this very moment?"

"Is it possible?" said my uncle, with tears in his eyes. "I beg your pardon. I had n't heard it. Proceed, by all means. I 'm sorry I interrupted you."

The next morning wicked Joe careered by again. "Good morning, Mr. Sheril. I s'pose you know my mother 's been lying dead these five years; but I 'm equally obliged for your politeness."

Vain was Uncle Fly's indignation. Greater men than he have had to give up before the sovereign power of a laugh, and erelong he resigned the office of tithing-man as one requiring a sterner metal than he possessed. In fact, an unsavory character, who haunted the tavern and was called by the boys Old Mopshear, gave a *résumé* of his opinions of tithing-men as seen from the camp of the enemy.

"Old Deacon Badger," he said, "was always lookin' 't other way, and never saw nothin' 't was goin' on. But there was Uncle Fliakim, — wal, to be sure the gals could n't tie up their shoes without he was a lookin'; but then, come to railly doin' anythin', it was only a snap, and he

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was off agin. He wa' n't much more'n a middlin'-sized grasshopper, arter all. Tell you what," said Mopshear, "it takes a fellow like Israel Scran, that knows what he 's about, and 's got some *body* to do with. When old Jerusalem Ben swore he 'd drive the stage through the town a Sunday, I tell you it was fun to see Israel Scran. He jest stood out by the road and met the hosses smack, and turned 'em so quick that the stage flopped over like a wink, and Ben was off rolling over and over in the sand. Ben got the wust on't that time. I tell you, it takes Israel Scran to be tithing-man!"

Good Uncle Fliakim had made himself extremely busy in my father's last sickness, dodging out of one door and in at another, at all hours; giving all manner of prescriptions for his temporal and spiritual state, but always in too much of a hurry to stop a minute, — a consideration which, I heard my father say, was the only one which made him tolerable. But, after all, I liked him, though he invariably tumbled over me, either in coming into or going out of the house, and then picked me up and gave me a cent, and went on rejoicing. The number of cents I acquired in this way became at last quite a little fortune.

But time would fail me to go on and describe all the quiddities and oddities of our Sunday congregation. Suffice it to say, that we all grew in those days like the apple-trees in our back lot. Every man had his own quirks and twists, and threw himself out freely in the line of his own individuality; and so a rather jerky, curious, original set of us there was. But such as we were, high and low, good and bad, refined and illiterate, barbarian and civilized, negro and white, the old meeting-house united us all on one day of the week, and its solemn services formed an insensible but strong bond of neighborhood charity.

We may rail at Blue Laws and Puritan strictness as much as we please, but certainly those communities where

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our fathers carried out their ideas fully had their strong points; and, rude and primitive as our meeting-houses were, this weekly union of all classes in them was a most powerful and efficient means of civilization. The man or woman cannot utterly sink who on every seventh day is obliged to appear in decent apparel, and to join with all the standing and respectability of the community in a united act of worship.

Nor were our Sunday services, though simple, devoid of their solemn forms. The mixed and motley congregation came in with due decorum during the ringing of the first bell, and waited in their seats the advent of the minister. The tolling of the bell was the signal for him that his audience were ready to receive him, and he started from his house. The clerical dress of the day, the black silk gown, the spotless bands, the wig and three-cornered hat and black gloves, were items of professional fitness which, in our minister's case, never failed of a due attention. When, with his wife leaning on his arm, he entered at the door of the meeting-house, the whole congregation rose and remained reverently standing until he had taken his seat in the pulpit. The same reverential decorum was maintained after service was over, when all remained standing and uncovered while the minister and his family passed down the broad aisle and left the house. Our fathers were no man-worshipers, but they regarded the minister as an ambassador from the great Sovereign of the universe, and paid reverence to Him whose word he bore in their treatment of him.

On the Sunday following the funeral of any one in the parish, it was customary to preach a sermon having immediate reference to the event which had occurred, in the course of which the nearest friends and relatives were directly addressed, and stood up in their seats to receive the pastoral admonition and consolation. I remember how

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wan and faded, like a shimmering flower, my poor mother rose in her place, while I was forcibly held down by Aunt Lois's grasp on my jacket till the "orphan children" were mentioned, when I was sent up on my feet with an impetus like a Jack-in-a-box; and afterward the whole family circle arose and stood, as the stream of admonition and condolence became more general. We were reminded that the God of the widow and orphan never dies, — that this life is the shadow, and the life to come the substance, — that there is but one thing needful, — that as our departed friend is to-day, so we may all be to-morrow; and then the choir sung, to the tune of old Darwen, —

"Shall man, O God of life and light,
Forever moulder in the grave?
Hast thou forgot thy glorious work,
Thy promise and thy power to save?"

I cannot say much for our country psalmody. Its execution was certainly open to severe criticism; and Uncle Fliakim, on every occasion of especial solemnity, aggravated its peculiarities by tuning up in a high, cracked voice a weird part, in those days called "counter," but which would in our days insure his being taken out of the house as a possessed person. But, in spite of all this, those old minor-keyed funeral hymns in which our fathers delighted always had a quality in them that affected me powerfully. The music of all barbarous nations is said to be in the minor key, and there is in its dark combinations something that gives piercing utterance to that undertone of doubt, mystery, and sorrow by which a sensitive spirit always is encompassed in this life.

I was of a peculiarly sensitive organization; my nerves shivered to every touch, like harp-strings. What might have come over me had I heard the solemn chants of cathedrals, and the deep pulsations of the old organ-hearts that beat there, I cannot say, but certain it is that the rude and

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primitive singing in our old meeting-house always excited me powerfully. It brought over me, like a presence, the sense of the infinite and eternal, the yearning and the fear and the desire of the poor finite being, so ignorant and so helpless. I left the church lifted up as if walking on air, with the final words of the psalm floating like an illuminated cloud around me, —

"Faith sees the bright eternal doors
Unfold to make His children way;
They shall be crowned with endless life,
And shine in everlasting day."

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CHAPTER VI

FIRE-LIGHT TALKS IN MY GRANDMOTHER'S KITCHEN

My grandmother's kitchen was a great, wide, roomy apartment, whose white-sanded floor was always as clean as hands could make it. It was resplendent with the sheen of a set of scoured pewter plates and platters, which stood arranged on a dresser on one side. The great fireplace swept quite across another side. There we burned cord-wood, and the fire was built up on architectural principles known to those days. First came an enormous back-log, rolled in with the strength of two men, on the top of which was piled a smaller log; and then a fore-stick, of a size which would entitle it to rank as a log in our times, went to make the front foundation of the fire. The rearing of the ample pile thereupon was a matter of no small architectural skill, and all the ruling members of our family circle had their own opinions about its erection, which they maintained with the zeal and pertinacity which become earnest people. My grandfather, with his grave smile, insisted that he was the only reasonable fire-builder of the establishment; but when he had arranged his sticks in the most methodical order, my grandmother would be sure to rush out with a thump here and a twitch there, and divers incoherent exclamations tending to imply that men never knew how to build a fire. Frequently her intense zeal for immediate effect would end in a general rout and roll of the sticks in all directions, with puffs of smoke down the chimney, requiring the setting open of the outside door; and then Aunt Lois would come to the rescue, and, with

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a face severe with determination, tear down the whole structure and rebuild from the foundation with exactest precision, but with an air that cast volumes of contempt on all that had gone before. The fact is, that there is no little nook of domestic life which gives snug harbor to so much self-will and self-righteousness as the family hearth; and this is particularly the case with wood fires, because, from the miscellaneous nature of the material, and the sprightly activity of the combustion, there is a constant occasion for tending and alteration, and so a vast field for individual opinion.

We had come home from our second Sunday service. Our evening meal of smoking brown bread and baked beans had been discussed, and the supper-things washed and put out of sight. There was an uneasy, chill moaning and groaning out of doors showing the coming up of an autumn storm, — just enough chill and wind to make the brightness of a social hearth desirable, — and my grandfather had built one of his most methodical and splendid fires.

The wide, ample depth of the chimney was aglow in all its cavernous length with the warm leaping light that burst out in lively jets and spirts from every rift and chasm. The great black crane that swung over it, with its multiplicity of pot-hooks and trammels, seemed to have a sort of dusky illumination, like that of old Cæsar's black, shining face, as he sat on his block of wood in the deep recess of the farther corner, with his hands on the knees of his Sunday pantaloons, gazing lovingly into the blaze with all the devotion of a fire-worshiper. On week-day evenings old Cæsar used to have his jack-knife in active play in this corner, and whistles and pop-guns and squirrel-traps for us youngsters grew under his plastic hand; but on Sunday evening he was too good a Christian even to think of a jack-knife, and if his hand casually encountered it in his pocket, he resisted it as a temptation of the Devil, and sat

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peacefully winking and blinking, and occasionally breaking out into a ripple of private giggles which appeared to spring purely from the overflow of bodily contentment. My Uncle Bill was in that condition which is peculiarly apt to manifest itself in the youth of well-conducted families on Sunday evenings, — a kind of friskiness of spirits which appears to be a reactionary state from the spiritual tension of the day, inclining him to skirmish round on all the borders and outskirts of permitted pleasantry, and threatening every minute to burst out into most unbecoming uproariousness. This state among the youngsters of a family on Sunday evening is a familiar trial of all elders who have had the task of keeping them steady during the sacred hours.

My Uncle Bill, in his week-day frame, was the wit and buffoon of the family, — an adept in every art that could shake the sides, and bring a laugh out on the gravest face. His features were flexible, his powers of grimace and story-telling at times irresistible. On the present occasion it was only my poor mother's pale, sorrowful face that kept him in any decent bounds. He did not wish to hurt his sister's feelings, but he was boiling over with wild and elfish impulses, which he vented now by a sly tweak at the cat's tail, then by a surreptitious dig at black Cæsar's sides, which made the poor black a helpless, quivering mass of giggle, and then he would slyly make eyes and mouths at Bill and me behind Aunt Lois's chair, which almost slew us with laughter, though all the while he appeared with painful effort to keep on a face of portentous gravity.

On the part of Aunt Lois, however, there began to be manifested unequivocal symptoms that it was her will and pleasure to have us all leave our warm fireside and establish ourselves in the best room, — for we had a best room, else wherefore were we on tea-drinking terms with the high

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aristocracy of Oldtown? We had our best room, and kept it as cold, as uninviting and stately, as devoid of human light or warmth, as the most fashionable shut-up parlor of modern days. It had the tallest and brightest pair of brass andirons conceivable, and a shovel and tongs to match, that were so heavy that the mere lifting them was work enough, without doing anything with them. It had also a bright-varnished mahogany tea-table, over which was a looking-glass in a gilt frame, with a row of little architectural balls on it; which looking-glass was always kept shrouded in white muslin at all seasons of the year, on account of a tradition that flies might be expected to attack it for one or two weeks in summer. But truth compels me to state, that I never saw or heard of a fly whose heart could endure Aunt Lois's parlor. It was so dark, so cold, so still, that all that frisky, buzzing race, who delight in air and sunshine, universally deserted and seceded from it; yet the looking-glass, and occasionally the fire-irons, were rigorously shrouded, as if desperate attacks might any moment be expected.

Now the kitchen was my grandmother's own room. In one corner of it stood a round table with her favorite books, her great work-basket, and by it a rickety rocking-chair, the bottom of which was of ingenious domestic manufacture, being in fact made by interwoven strips of former coats and pantaloons of the home circle; but a most comfortable and easy seat it made. My grandfather had also a large splint-bottomed arm-chair, with rockers to it, in which he swung luxuriously in the corner of the great fireplace. By the side of its ample blaze we sat down to our family meals, and afterwards, while grandmother and Aunt Lois washed up the tea-things, we all sat and chatted by the firelight. Now it was a fact that nobody liked to sit in the best room. In the kitchen each member of the family had established unto him or her self some little pet

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private snuggery, some chair or stool, some individual nook, — forbidden to gentility, but dear to the ungenteel natural heart, — that we looked back to regretfully when we were banished to the colder regions of the best room.

There the sitting provisions were exactly one dozen stuffed-seated cherry chairs, with upright backs and griffin feet, each foot terminating in a bony claw, which resolutely grasped a ball. These chairs were high and slippery, and preached decorum in the very attitudes which they necessitated, as no mortal could ever occupy them except in the exercise of a constant and collected habit of mind.

Things being thus, when my Uncle Bill saw Aunt Lois take up some coals on a shovel, and look towards the best-room door, he came and laid his hand on hers directly, with, "Now, Lois, what are you going to do?"

"Going to make up a fire in the best room."

"Now, Lois, I protest. You 're not going to do any such thing. Hang grandeur and all that.

> "'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
> Be it ever so humble, there 's no place like home,'

you know; and home means right here by mother's kitchen-fire, where she and father sit, and want to sit. You know nobody ever wants to go into that terrible best room of yours."

"Now, Bill, how you talk!" said Aunt Lois, smiling, and putting down her shovel.

"But then, you see," she said, the anxious cloud again settling down on her brow, — "you see, we 're exposed to calls, and who knows who may come in? I should n't wonder if Major Broad, or Miss Mehitable, might drop in, as they saw you down from college."

"Let 'em come; never fear. They all know we 've got a best room, and that 's enough. Or, if you 'd rather, I 'll pin a card to that effect upon the door; and then we 'll take our ease. Or, better than that, I 'll take 'em all in

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and show 'em our best chairs, andirons, and mahogany table, and then we can come out and be comfortable."

"Bill, you 're a saucy boy," said Aunt Lois, looking at him indulgently as she subsided into her chair.

"Yes, that he always was," said my grandfather, with a smile of the kind that fathers give to frisky sophomores in college.

"Well, come sit down, anyway," said my grandmother, "and let 's have a little Sunday-night talk."

"Sunday-night talk, with all my heart," said Bill, as he seated himself comfortably right in front of the cheerful blaze. "Well, it must be about 'the meetin',' of course. Our old meeting-house looks as elegant as ever. Of all the buildings I ever saw to worship any kind of a being in, that meeting-house certainly is the most extraordinary. It really grows on me every time I come home!"

"Come, now, Bill," said Aunt Lois.

"Come, now! Ain't I coming? Have n't said anything but what you all know. Said our meeting-house was extraordinary, and you all know it is; and there 's extraordinary folks in it. I don't believe so queer a tribe could be mustered in all the land of Israel as we congregate. I hope some of our oddities will be in, this evening, after cider. I need to study a little, so that I can give representations of nature in our club at Cambridge. Nothing like going back to nature, you know. Old Obscue, seems to me, was got up in fine fancy this morning; and Sam Lawson had an extra touch of the hearse about him. Hepsy must have been disciplining him this morning, before church. I always know when Sam is fresh from a matrimonial visitation; he 's peculiarly pathetic about the gills at those times. Why don't Sam come in here?"

"I 'm sure I hope he won't," said Aunt Lois. "One reason why I wanted to sit in the best room to-night was that every old tramper and queer object sees the light of

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our kitchen fire, and comes in for a lounge and a drink; and then, when one has genteel persons calling, it makes it unpleasant."

"Oh, we all know you 're aristocratic, Lois; but, you see, you can't be indulged. You must have your purple and fine linen and your Lazarus at the gate come together some time, just as they do in the meeting-house and the graveyard. Good for you all, if not agreeable."

Just at this moment the conversation was interrupted by a commotion in the back sink-room, which sounded much like a rush of a flight of scared fowl. It ended with a tumble of a row of milk-pans toward chaos, and the door flew open and Uncle Fly appeared.

"What on earth!" said my grandmother, starting up. "That you, 'Liakim? Why on earth *must* you come in the back way and knock down all my milk-pans?"

"Why, I came 'cross lots from Aunt Bathsheba Sawin's," said Uncle Fly, dancing in, "and I got caught in those pesky blackberry-bushes in the graveyard, and I do believe I 've torn my breeches all to pieces," he added, pirouetting and frisking with very airy gyrations, and trying vainly to get a view of himself behind, in which operation he went round and round as a cat does after her tail.

"Laws a-massy, 'Liakim!" said my grandmother, whose ears were startled by a peculiar hissing sound in the sink-room, which caused her to spring actively in that direction. "Well, now, you have been and done it! You 've gone and fidgeted the tap out of my beer-barrel, and here 's the beer all over the floor. I hope you 're satisfied now."

"Sorry for it. Did n't mean to. I 'll wipe it right up. Where 's a towel, or floor-cloth, or something?" cried Uncle Fly, whirling in more active circles round and round, till he seemed to me to have a dozen pairs of legs.

"Do sit down, 'Liakim," said my grandmother. "Of course you did n't mean to; but next time don't come

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bustling and whirligigging through my back sink-room after dark. I do believe you never will be quiet till you 're in your grave."

"Sit down, uncle," said Bill. "Never mind mother, — she 'll come all right by and by. And never mind your breeches, — all things earthly are transitory, as Parson Lothrop told us to-day. Now let 's come back to our Sunday talk. Did ever anybody see such an astonishing providence as Miss Mehitable Rossiter's bonnet to-day? Does it belong to the old or the new dispensation, do you think?"

"Bill, I 'm astonished at you!" said Aunt Lois.

"Miss Mehitable is of a most respectable family," said Aunt Keziah, reprovingly. "Her father and grandfather and great-grandfather were all ministers; and two of her mother's brothers, Jeduthun and Amariah."

"Now, take care, youngster," said Uncle Fly. "You see you young colts must n't be too airy. When a fellow begins to speak evil of bonnets, nobody knows where he may end."

"Bless me, one and all of you," said Bill, "I have the greatest respect for Miss Mehitable. Furthermore, I like her. She 's a real spicy old concern. I 'd rather talk with her than any dozen of modern girls. But I do wish she 'd give me that bonnet to put in our Cambridge cabinet. I 'd tell 'em it was the wing of a Madagascar bat. Blessed old soul, how innocent she sat under it! — never knowing to what wandering thoughts it was giving rise. Such bonnets interfere with my spiritual progress."

At this moment, by the luck that always brings in the person people are talking of, Miss Mehitable came in, with the identical old wonder on her head. Now, outside of our own blood-relations, no one that came within our doors ever received a warmer welcome than Miss Mehitable. Even the children loved her, with that instinctive sense by which children and dogs learn the discerning of spirits.

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To be sure she was as gaunt and brown as the Ancient Mariner, but hers was a style of ugliness that was neither repulsive nor vulgar. Personal uncomeliness has its differing characters, and there are some very homely women who have a style that amounts to something like beauty. I know that this is not the common view of the matter; but I am firm in the faith that some very homely women have a certain attraction about them which is increased by their homeliness. It is like the quaintness of Japanese china, — not beautiful, but having a strong, pronounced character, as far remote as possible from the ordinary and vulgar, and which, in union with vigorous and agreeable traits of mind, is more stimulating than any mere insipid beauty.

In short, Miss Mehitable was a specimen of what I should call the good-goblin style of beauty. And people liked her so much that they came to like the singularities which individualized her from all other people. Her features were prominent and harsh; her eyebrows were shaggy, and finished abruptly half across her brow, leaving but half an eyebrow on each side. She had, however, clear, trustworthy, steady eyes, of a greenish gray, which impressed one with much of that idea of steadfast faithfulness that one sees in the eyes of some good, homely dogs. "Faithful and true," was written in her face as legibly as eyes could write it.

For the rest, Miss Mehitable had a strong mind, was an omnivorous reader, apt, ready in conversation, and with a droll, original way of viewing things, which made her society ever stimulating. To me her house was always full of delightful images, — a great, calm, cool, shady, old-fashioned house, full of books and of quaint old furniture, with a garden on one side where were no end of lilies, hollyhocks, pinks, and peonies, to say nothing of currants, raspberries, apples, and pears, and other carnal delights, all of which good Miss Mehitable was free to dispense to her

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child-visitors. It was my image of heaven to be allowed to go to spend an afternoon with Miss Mehitable, and establish myself, in a shady corner of the old study which contained her father's library, over an edition of Æsop's Fables illustrated with plates, which, opened, was an endless field of enchantment to me.

Miss Mehitable lived under the watch and charge of an ancient female domestic named Polly Shubel. Polly was a representative specimen of the now extinct species of Yankee serving-maids. She had been bred up from a child in the Rossiter family of some generations back. She was of that peculiar kind of constitution, known in New England, which merely becomes drier and tougher with the advance of time, without giving any other indications of old age. The exact number of her years was a point unsettled even among the most skillful genealogists of Oldtown. Polly was a driving, thrifty, doctrinal and practical female, with strong bones and muscles, and strong opinions, believing most potently in early rising, soap and sand, and the Assembly's Catechism, and knowing certainly all that she did know. Polly considered Miss Mehitable as a sort of child under her wardship, and conducted the whole business of life for her with a sovereign and unanswerable authority. As Miss Mehitable's tastes were in the world of books and ideas, rather than of physical matters, she resigned herself to Polly's sway with as good a grace as possible, though sometimes she felt that it rather abridged her freedom of action.

Luckily for my own individual self, Polly patronized me, and gave me many a piece of good advice, sweetened with gingerbread, when I went to visit Miss Rossiter. I counted Miss Mehitable among my personal friends; so tonight, when she came in, I came quickly and laid hold of the skirt of her gown, and looked admiringly upon her dusky face, under the portentous shadow of a great bonnet

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shaded by nodding bows of that preternatural color which people used to call olive-green. She had a word for us all, a cordial grasp of the hand for my mother, who sat silent and thoughtful in her corner, and a warm hand-shake all round.

"You see," she said, drawing out an old-fashioned snuff-box, and tapping upon it, "my house grew so stupid that I must come and share my pinch of snuff with you. It 's windy out to-night, and I should think a storm was brewing; and the rattling of one's own window-blinds, as one sits alone, is n't half so amusing as some other things."

"You know, Miss Rossiter, we 're always delighted to have you come in," said my grandmother, and my Aunt Lois, and my Aunt Keziah, all at once. This, by the way, was a little domestic trick that the females of our family had; and, as their voices were upon very different keys, the effect was somewhat peculiar. My Aunt Lois's voice was high and sharp, my grandmother's a hearty chest-tone, while Aunt Keziah's had an uncertain buzz between the two, like the vibrations of a loose string; but as they all had corresponding looks and smiles of welcome, Miss Mehitable was pleased.

"I always indulge myself in thinking I am welcome," she said. "And now pray how is our young scholar, Master William Badger? What news do you bring us from old Harvard?"

"Almost anything you want to hear, Miss Mehitable. You know that I am your most devoted slave."

"Not so sure of that, sir," she said, with a whimsical twinkle of her eye. "Don't you know that your sex are always treacherous? How do I know that you don't serve up old Miss Rossiter when you give representations of the Oldtown curiosities there at Cambridge? We are a set here that might make a boy's fortune in that line, — now are n't we?"

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"How do you know that I do serve up Oldtown curiosities?" said Bill, somewhat confused, and blushing to the roots of his hair.

"How do I know? Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? and can you help being a mimic, as you were born, always were and always will be?"

"Oh, but I 'm sure, Miss Mehitable, Bill never would, — he has too much respect," said Aunt Keziah and Aunt Lois, simultaneously again.

"Perhaps not; but if he wants to, he 's welcome. What are queer old women for, if young folks may not have a good laugh out of them now and then? If it 's only a friendly laugh, it 's just as good as crying, and better too. I 'd like to be made to laugh at myself. I think generally we take ourselves altogether too seriously. What now, bright eyes?" she added, as I nestled nearer to her. "Do you want to come up into an old woman's lap? Well, here you come. Bless me, what a tangle of curls we have here! Don't your thoughts get caught in these curls sometimes?"

I looked bashful and wistful at this address, and Miss Mehitable went on twining my curls around her fingers, and trotting me on her knee, lulling me into a delicious dreaminess, in which she seemed to me to be one of those nice, odd-looking old fairy women that figure to such effect in stories.

The circle all rose again as Major Broad came in. Aunt Lois thought, with evident anguish, of the best room. Here was the Major, sure enough, and we all sitting round the kitchen fire! But my grandfather and grandmother welcomed him cheerfully to their corner, and enthroned him in my grandfather's splint-bottomed rocking-chair, where he sat far more comfortably than if he had been perched on a genteel, slippery-bottomed stuffed chair with claw feet.

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The Major performed the neighborly kindnesses of the occasion in an easy way. He spoke a few words to my mother of the esteem and kindness he had felt for my father, in a manner that called up the blood into her thin cheeks, and made her eyes dewy with tears. Then he turned to the young collegian, recognizing him as one of the rising lights of Oldtown.

"Our only nobility now," he said to my grandfather. "We 've cut off everything else: no distinction now, sir, but educated and uneducated."

"It is a hard struggle for our human nature to give up titles and ranks, though," said Miss Mehitable. "For my part, I have a ridiculous kindness for them yet. I know it 's all nonsense; but I can't help looking back to the court we used to have at the Government House in Boston. You know it was something to hear of the goings and doings of my Lord this and my Lady that, and of Sir Thomas and Sir Peter and Sir Charles, and all the rest of 'em."

"Yes," said Bill; "the Oldtown folks call their minister's wife Lady yet."

"Well, that 's a little comfort," said Miss Mehitable; "one don't want life an entire dead level. Do let us have one titled lady among us."

"And a fine lady she is," said the Major. "Our parson did a good thing in that alliance."

While the conversation was thus taking a turn of the most approved genteel style, Aunt Keziah's ears heard alarming premonitory sounds outside the door. "Who 's that at the scraper?" said she.

"Oh, it 's Sam Lawson," said Aunt Lois, with a sort of groan. "You may be sure of that."

"Come in, Sam, my boy," said Uncle Bill, opening the door. "Glad to see you."

"Wal now, Mr. Badger," said Sam, with white eyes of

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veneration, "I 'm real glad to see ye. I telled Hepsy you 'd want to see me. You 're the fust one of my Saturday arternoon fishin' boys that 's got into college, and I 'm 'mazing proud on 't. I tell you I walk tall, — ask 'em if I don't, round to the store."

"You always were gifted in that line," said Bill. "But come, sit down in the corner and tell us what you 've been about."

"Wal, you see, I thought I 'd jest go over to North Parish this arternoon, jest for a change, like, and I wanted to hear one of them *Hopkintinsians* they tell so much about; and Parson Simpson, he 's one on 'em."

"You ought not to be roving off on Sunday, leaving your own meeting," said my grandfather.

"Wal, you see, Deacon Badger, I 'm interested in these 'ere new doctrines. I met your Polly a-goin' over, too," he said to Miss Mehitable.

"Oh yes," said Miss Mehitable, "Polly is a great Hopkinsian. She can hardly have patience to sit under our Parson Lothrop's preaching. It 's rather hard on me, because Polly makes it a point of conscience to fight every one of his discourses over to me in my parlor. Somebody gave Polly an Arminian tract last Sunday, entitled, 'The Apostle Paul an Arminian.' It would have done you good to hear Polly's comments. ''Postle Paul an Arminian! He 's the biggest 'lectioner of 'em all.' "

"That he is," said my grandmother, warmly. "Polly 's read her Bible to some purpose."

"Well, Sam, what did you think of the sermon?" said Uncle Bill.

"Wal," said Sam, leaning over the fire, with his long, bony hands alternately raised to catch the warmth, and then dropped with an utter laxness, when the warmth became too pronounced, "Parson Simpson 's a smart man; but, I tell ye, it 's kind o' discouragin'. Why, he said

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our state and condition by nature was just like this. We was clear down in a well fifty feet deep, and the sides all round nothin' but glare ice; but we was under immediate obligations to get out, 'cause we was free, voluntary agents. But nobody ever had got out, and nobody would, unless the Lord reached down and took 'em. And whether he would or not nobody could tell; it was all sovereignty. He said there wa' n't one in a hundred, — not one in a thousand, — not one in ten thousand, — that would be saved. Lordy massy, says I to myself, ef that 's so they 're any of 'em welcome to my chance. And so I kind o' ris up and come out, 'cause I 'd got a pretty long walk home, and I wanted to go round by South Pond, and inquire about Aunt Sally Morse's toothache."

"I heard the whole sermon over from Polly," said Miss Mehitable, "and as it was not a particularly cheerful subject to think of, I came over here." These words were said with a sort of chilly, dreary sigh, that made me turn and look up in Miss Mehitable's face. It looked haggard and weary, as of one tired of struggling with painful thoughts.

"Wal," said Sam Lawson, "I stopped a minute round to your back door, Miss Rossiter, to talk with Polly about the sermon. I was a-tellin' Polly that that 'ere was puttin' inability a leetle too strong."

"Not a bit, not a bit," said Uncle Fly, "so long as it 's moral inability. There 's the point, ye see, — *moral*, — that 's the word. That makes it all right."

"Wal," said Sam, "I was a-puttin' it to Polly this way. Ef a man 's cut off his hands, it ain't to require him to chop wood. Wal, Polly, she says he 'd no business to cut his hands off; and so he ought to be required to chop the wood all the same. Wal, I telled her it was Adam chopped our hands off. But she said, no; it was we did it *in* Adam, and she brought up the catechise plain enough, — '*We sinned in him*, and fell with him.' "

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"She had you there, Sam," said Uncle Fly, with great content. "You won't catch Polly tripping on the catechism."

"Well, for my part," said Major Broad, "I don't like these doctrinal subtilties, Deacon Badger. Now, I 've got a volume of Mr. Addison's religious writings that seem to me about the right thing. They 're very pleasing reading. Mr. Addison is my favorite author of a Sunday."

"I 'm afraid Mr. Addison had nothing but just mere morality and natural religion," said my grandmother, who could not be withheld from bearing her testimony. "You don't find any of the discriminating doctrines in Mr. Addison. Major Broad, did you ever read Mr. Bellamy's 'True Religion Delineated and Distinguished from all Counterfeits'?"

"No, madam, I never did," said Major Broad.

"Well, I earnestly hope you will read *that* book," said my grandmother.

"My wife is always at me about one good book or another," said my grandfather; "but I manage to do with my old Bible. I have n't used that up yet."

"I should know about Dr. Bellamy's book by this time," said Miss Mehitable, "for Polly intrenches herself in that, and preaches out of it daily. Polly certainly missed her vocation when she was trained for a servant. She is a born professor of theology. She is so circumstantial about all that took place at the time the angels fell, and when the covenant was made with Adam in the Garden of Eden, that I sometimes question whether she really might not have been there personally. Polly is particularly strong on Divine sovereignty. She thinks it applies to everything under the sun except my affairs. Those she chooses to look after herself."

"Well," said Major Broad, "I am not much of a theologian. I want to be taught my duty. Parson Lothrop's

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discourses are generally very clear and practical, and they suit me."

"They are good as far as they go," said my grandmother, "but I like good, strong, old-fashioned doctrine. I like such writers as Mr. Edwards and Dr. Bellamy and Dr. Hopkins. It 's all very well, your essays on cheerfulness and resignation, and all that; but I want something that takes strong hold of you, so that you feel something has got you that *can* hold."

"The Cambridge Platform, for instance," said Uncle Bill.

"Yes, my son, the Cambridge Platform. I ain't ashamed of it. It was made by men whose shoe-latchet we are n't worthy to unloose. I believe it, — every word on't. I believe it, and I 'm going to believe it."

"And would if there was twice as much of it," said Uncle Bill. "That 's right, mother, stand up for your colors. I admire your spirit. But, Sam, what does Hepsy think of all this? I suppose you enlighten her when you return from your investigations."

"Wal, I try to. But lordy massy, Mr. Badger, Hepsy don't take no kind o' interest in the doctrines, no more 'n nothin' at all. She 's so kind 'o worldly, Hepsy is. It 's allers meat and drink, meat and drink, with her. That 's all she 's thinkin' of."

"And if *you* would think more of such things, she would n't have to think so much," said Aunt Lois, sharply. "Don't you know the Bible says, that the man that provideth not for his own household hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel?"

"I don't see," said Sam, slowly flopping his great hands up and down over the blaze, — "I railly don't see why folks are allers a-throwin' up that 'ere text at me. I 'm sure I work as hard as a man ken. Why, I was a-workin' last night till nigh twelve o'clock, doin' up odd jobs o' blacksmithin'. They kind o' 'cumulate, ye know."

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"Mr. Lawson," said my grandmother, with a look of long-suffering patience, "how often and often must I tell you, that if you 'd be steadier round your home, and work in regular hours, Hepsy would be more comfortable, and things would go on better?"

"Lordy massy, Mis' Badger, bless your soul and body, ye don't know nothin' about it; — ye don't know nothin' what I undergo. Hepsy, she 's at me from morning till night. First it 's one thing, and then another. One day it rains, and her clothes-line breaks. She 's at me 'bout that. Now I tell her, 'Hepsy, I ain't to blame, — I don't make the rain.' And then another day she 's at me agin 'cause the wind 's east, and fetches the smoke down chimbley. I tell her, 'Hepsy, now look here, — *do* I make the wind blow?' But it 's no use talkin' to Hepsy."

"Well, Sam, I take your part," said Bill. "I always knew you was a regular martyr. Come, boys, go down cellar and draw a pitcher of cider. We 'll stay him with flagons, and comfort him with apples. Won't we, Sam?"

As Sam was prime favorite with all boys, my brother Bill and I started willingly enough on this errand, one carrying the candle and the other a great stone pitcher of bountiful proportions, which always did hospitable duty on similar occasions.

Just as we returned, bearing our pitcher, there came another rap at the outside door of the kitchen, and Old Betty Poganut and Sally Wonsamug stood at the door.

"Well, now, Mis' Badger," said Betty, "Sally and me, we thought we must jest run in, we got so scar't. We was coming through that Bill Morse's woods, and there come such a flash o' lightnin' it most blinded us, and the wind blew enough to blow a body over; and we thought there was a storm right down on us, and we run jest as fast as we could. We did n't know what to do, we was so scar't. I 'm mortal 'fraid of lightning."

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"Why, Betty, you forgot the sermon to-day. You should have said your prayers, as Parson Lothrop tells you," said my grandfather.

"Well, I did kind o' put up a sort o' silent 'jaculation, as a body may say. That is, I jest said, 'O Lord,' and kind o' gin him a wink, you know."

"Oh, you did!" said my grandfather.

"Yes, I kind o' thought He 'd know what I meant."

My grandfather turned with a smile to Miss Mehitable. "These Indians have their own wild ways of looking at things after all."

"Well, now, I s'pose you have n't had a bit of supper, either of you," said my grandmother, getting up. "It 's commonly the way of it."

"Well, to tell the truth, I was sayin' to Sarah that if we come down to Mis' Deacon Badger 's I should n't wonder if we got something good," said Betty, her broad, coarse face and baggy cheeks beginning to be illuminated with a smile.

"Here, Horace, you come and hold the candle while I go into the buttery and get 'em some cold pork and beans," said my grandmother, cheerily. "The poor creturs don't get a good meal of victuals very often; and I baked a good lot on purpose."

If John Bunyan had known my grandmother, he certainly would have introduced her in some of his histories as "the housekeeper whose name was Bountiful;" and under her care an ample meal of brown bread and pork and beans was soon set forth on the table in the corner of the kitchen, to which the two hungry Indian women sat down with the appetite of wolves. A large mug was placed between them, which Uncle Bill filled to the brim with cider.

"I s'pose you 'd like twice a mug better than once a mug, Sally," he said, punning on her name.

"Oh, if the mug 's only big enough," said Sally, her snaky

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eyes gleaming with appetite; "and it 's always a good big mug one gets here."

Sam Lawson's great white eyes began irresistibly to wander in the direction of the plentiful cheer which was being so liberally dispensed at the other side of the room.

"Want some, Sam, my boy?" said Uncle Bill, with a patronizing freedom.

"Why, bless your soul, Master Bill, I would n't care a bit if I took a plate o' them beans and some o' that 'ere pork. Hepsy did n't save no beans for me; and, walkin' all the way from North Parish, I felt kind o' empty and windy, as a body may say. You know Scriptur' tells about bein' filled with the east wind; but I never found it noways satisfyin', — it sets sort o' cold on the stomach."

"Draw up, Sam, and help yourself," said Uncle Bill, putting plate and knife and fork before him; and Sam soon showed that he had a vast internal capacity for the stowing away of beans and brown bread.

Meanwhile Major Broad and my grandfather drew their chairs together, and began a warm discussion of the Constitution of the United States, which had been recently presented for acceptance in a Convention of the State of Massachusetts.

"I have n't seen you, Major Broad," said my grandfather, "since you came back from the Convention. I 'm very anxious to have our State of Massachusetts accept that Constitution. We 're in an unsettled condition now; we don't know fairly where we are. If we accept this Constitution, we shall be a nation, — we shall have something to go to work on."

"Well, Deacon Badger, to say the truth, I could not vote for this Constitution in Convention. They have adopted it by a small majority; but I shall be bound to record my dissent from it."

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"Pray, Major, what are your objections?" said Miss Mehitable.

"I have two. One is, it gives too much power to the President. There 's an appointing power and a power of patronage that will play the mischief some day in the hands of an ambitious man. That 's one objection. The other is the recognizing and encouraging of slavery in the Constitution. That is such a dreadful wrong, — such a shameful inconsistency, — when we have just come through a battle for the doctrine that all men are free and equal, to turn round and found our national government on a recognition of African slavery. It cannot and will not come to good."

"Oh, well," said my grandfather, "slavery will gradually die out. You see how it is going in the New England States."

"I cannot think so," said the Major. "I have a sort of feeling about this that I cannot resist. If we join those States that still mean to import and use slaves, our nation will meet some dreadful punishment. I am certain of it."[1]

"Well, really," said my grandfather, "I 'm concerned to hear you speak so. I have felt such anxiety to have something settled. You see, without a union, we are all afloat, — we are separate logs, but no raft."

"Yes," said Miss Mehitable, "but nothing can be settled that is n't founded on right. We ought to dig deep, and lay our foundations on a rock, when we build for posterity."

"Were there many of your way of thinking in the Convention, Major?" said my grandfather.

"Well, we had a pretty warm discussion, and we came very near to carrying it. Now, in Middlesex County, for instance, where we are, there were only seventeen in favor

[1] The dissent of Major Broad of Natick, and several others on the grounds above stated, may still be read in the report of the proceedings of the Convention that ratified the Constitution.

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of the Constitution, and twenty-five against; and in Worcester County there were only seven in favor and forty-three against. Well, they carried it at last by a majority of nineteen; but the minority recorded their protest. Judge Widgery of Portland, General Thompson of Topsham, and Dr. Taylor of Worcester, rather headed the opposition. Then the town of Andover instructed its representative, Mr. Symmes, to vote against it, but he did n't, he voted on the other side, and I understand they are dreadfully indignant about it. I saw a man from Andover last week who said that he actually thought Symmes would be obliged to leave the town, he was so dreadfully unpopular."

"Well, Major Broad, I agree with you," said my grandmother, heartily, "and I honor you for the stand you took. Slavery is a sin and a shame; and I say, with Jacob, 'O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united.' I wish we may keep clear on't. I don't want anything that we can't ask God's blessing on heartily, and we certainly can't on this. Why, anybody that sees that great scar on Cæsar's forehead sees what slavery comes to."

My grandmother always pointed her anti-slavery arguments with an appeal to this mark of ill-usage which old Cæsar had received at the hands of a brutal master years before, and the appeal never failed to convince the domestic circle.

"Well," said my grandfather, after some moments of silence, in which he sat gazing fixedly at the great red coals of a hickory log, "you see, Major, it 's done, and can't be helped."

"It 's done," said the Major, "but in my opinion mischief will come of it as sure as there is a God in heaven."

"Let 's hope not," said my grandfather, placidly.

Outside the weather was windy and foul, the wind rat-

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tling doors, shaking and rumbling down the chimney, and causing the great glowing circle lighted by the fire to seem warmer and brighter. The Indian women and Sam Lawson, having finished their meal and thoroughly cleaned out the dishes, grouped themselves about the end of the ingle already occupied by black Cæsar, and began a little private gossip among themselves.

"I say," says Sam, raising his voice to call my grandfather's attention, "do you know, Deacon Badger, whether anybody is living in the Dench house now?"

"There was n't, the last I knew about it," said my grandfather.

"Wal, you won't make some folks believe but what that 'ere house is haunted."

"Haunted!" said Miss Mehitable; "nothing more likely. What old house is n't? — if one only knew it; and that certainly ought to be if ever a house was."

"But this 'ere 's a regular *haunt*," said Sam. "I was a-talkin' the other night with Bill Payne and Jake Marshall, and they both on 'em said that they 'd seen strange things in them grounds, — they 'd seen a figger of a man" —

"With his head under his arm," suggested Uncle Bill.

"No, a man in a long red cloak," said Sam Lawson, "such as Sir Harry Frankland used to wear."

"Poor Sir Harry!" said Miss Mehitable, "has he come to that?"

"Did you know Sir Harry?" said Aunt Lois.

"I have met him once or twice at the Governor's house," said Miss Mehitable. "Lady Lothrop knew Lady Frankland very well."

"Well, Sam," said Uncle Bill, "do let 's hear the end of his haunting."

"Nothin', only the other night I was a-goin' over to watch with Lem Moss, and I passed pretty nigh the Dench

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place, and I thought I 'd jest look round it a spell. And as sure as you 're alive I see smoke a-comin' out of the chimbley."

"I did n't know as ghosts ever used the fireplaces," said Uncle Bill. "Well, Sam, did you go in?"

"No, I was pretty much in a hurry; but I telled Jake and Bill, and then they each on 'em had something to match that they 'd seen. As nigh as I can make it out, there 's that 'ere boy that they say was murdered and thrown down that 'ere old well walks sometimes. And then there 's a woman appears to some, and this 'ere man in a red cloak; and they think it 's Sir Harry in his red cloak."

"For my part," said Aunt Lois, "I never had much opinion of Sir Harry Frankland, or Lady Frankland either. I don't think such goings on ever ought to be countenanced in society."

"They both repented bitterly, — repented in sackcloth and ashes," said Miss Mehitable. "And if God forgives such sins, why should n't we?"

"What was the story?" said Major Broad.

"Why," said Aunt Lois, "have n't you heard of Agnes Surriage, of Marblehead? She was housemaid in a tavern there, and Sir Harry fell in love with her, and took her and educated her. That was well enough; but when she 'd done going to school he took her home to his house in Boston, and called her his daughter; although people became pretty sure that the connection was not what it should be, and they refused to have anything to do with her. So he bought this splendid place out in the woods, and built a great palace of a house, and took Miss Agnes out there. People that wanted to be splendidly entertained, and that were not particular as to morals, used to go out to visit them."

"I used to hear great stories of their wealth and pomp

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and luxury," said my grandmother, "but I mourned over it, that it should come to this in New England, that people could openly set such an example and be tolerated. It would n't have been borne a generation before, I can tell you. No, indeed,—the magistrates would have put a stop to it. But these noblemen, when they came over to America, seemed to think themselves lords of God's heritage, and free to do just as they pleased."

"But," said Miss Mehitable, "they repented, as I said. He took her to England, and there his friends refused to receive her; and then he was appointed Ambassador to Lisbon, and he took her there. On the day of the great earthquake Sir Harry was riding with a lady of the court when the shock came, and in a moment, without warning, they found themselves buried under the ruins of a building they were passing. He wore a scarlet cloak, as was the fashion; and they say that in her dying agonies the poor creature bit through this cloak and sleeve into the flesh of his arm, and made a mark that he carried to his dying day. Sir Harry was saved by Agnes Surriage. She came over the ruins, calling and looking for him, and he heard her voice and answered, and she got men to come and dig him out. When he was in that dreadful situation, he made a vow to God, if he would save his life, that he would be a different man. And he was a changed man from that day. He was married to Agnes Surriage as soon as they could get a priest to perform the ceremony; and when he took her back to England all his relations received her, and she was presented in court and moved in society with perfect acceptance."

"I don't think it ever ought to have been," said Aunt Lois. "Such women never ought to be received."

"What! is there no place of repentance for a woman?" said Miss Mehitable. "Christ said, 'Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.'"

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I noticed again that sort of shiver of feeling in Miss Mehitable; and there was a peculiar thrill in her voice, as she said these words, that made me sensible that she was speaking from some inward depth of feeling.

"Don't you be so hard and sharp, Lois," said my grandmother; "sinners must have patience with sinners."

"Especially with sinners of quality, Lois," said Uncle Bill. "By all accounts Sir Harry and Lady Frankland swept all before them when they came back to Boston."

"Of course," said Miss Mehitable; "what was done in court would be done in Boston, and whom Queen Charlotte received would be received in our upper circles. Lady Lothrop never called on her till she was Lady Frankland, but after that I believe she has visited out at their place."

"Wal, I've heerd 'em say," said Sam Lawson, "that it would take a woman two days just to get through cleaning the silver that there was in that 'ere house, to say nothing about the carpets and the curtains and the tapestry. But then, when the war broke out, Lady Frankland, she took most of it back to England, I guess, and the house has been back and forward to one and another. I never could rightly know jest who did live in it. I heard about some French folks that lived there one time. I thought some day, when I had n't nothin' else to do, I 'd jest walk over to old Granny Walker's, that lives over the other side of Hopkinton. She used to be a housekeeper to Lady Frankland, and I could get particulars out o' her."

"Well," said Miss Mehitable, "I know one woman that must go back to a haunted house, and that is this present one." So saying, she rose and put me off her knee.

"Send this little man over to see me to-morrow," she said to my mother. "Polly has a cake for him, and I shall find something to amuse him."

Major Broad, with old-fashioned gallantry, insisted on waiting on Miss Mehitable home; and Sam Lawson re-

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luctantly tore himself from the warm corner to encounter the asperities of his own fireside.

"Here, Sam," said good-natured Bill, "here 's a great red apple for Hepsy."

"Ef I dares to go nigh enough to give it to her," said Sam, with a grimace. "She 's allers a-castin' it up at me that I don't want to set with her at home. But lordy massy, she don't consider that a fellow don't want to set and be hectored and lectured when he can do better elsewhere."

"True enough, Sam; but give my regards to her."

As to the two Indian women, they gave it as their intention to pass the night by the kitchen fire; and my grandmother, to whom such proceedings were not at all strange, assented, — producing for each a blanket, which had often seen similar service. My grandfather closed the evening by bringing out his great Bible and reading a chapter. Then we all knelt down in prayer.

So passed an evening in my grandmother's kitchen, — where religion, theology, politics, the gossip of the day, and the legends of the supernatural all conspired to weave a fabric of thought quaint and various. Intense earnestness, a solemn undertone of deep mournful awe, was overlaid with quaint traceries of humor, strange and weird in their effect. I was one of those children who are all ear, — dreamy listeners, who brood over all that they hear, without daring to speak of it; and in this evening's conversation I had heard enough to keep my eyes broad open long after my mother had laid me in bed. The haunted house and its vague wonders filled my mind, and I determined to question Sam Lawson yet more about it.

But now that I have fairly introduced myself, the scene of my story, and many of the actors in it, I must take my reader off for a while, and relate a history that must at last blend with mine in one story.

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CHAPTER VII

OLD CRAB SMITH

On the brow of yonder hill you see that old, red farmhouse, with its slanting back roof relieved against the golden sky of the autumn afternoon. The house lifts itself up dark and clear under the shadow of two great elm-trees that droop over it, and is the first of a straggling, irregular cluster of farmhouses that form the village of Needmore. A group of travelers, sitting on a bit of rock in the road below the hill on which the farmhouse stands, are looking up to it, in earnest conversation.

"Mother, if you can only get up there, we 'll ask them to let you go in and rest," said a little boy of nine years to a weary, pale, sick-looking woman who sat as in utter exhaustion and discouragement on the rock. A little girl two years younger than the boy sat picking at the moss at her feet, and earnestly listening to her older brother with the air of one who is attending to the words of a leader.

"I don't feel as if I could get a step farther," said the woman; and the increasing deadly paleness of her face confirmed her words.

"O mother, don't give up," said the boy; "just rest here a little and then lean on me, and we 'll get you up the hill; and then I 'm sure they 'll take you in. Come, now; I 'll run and get you some water in our tin cup, and you 'll feel better soon." And the boy ran to a neighboring brook and filled a small tin cup, and brought the cool water to his mother.

She drank it, and then, fixing a pair of dark, pathetic

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eyes on the face of her boy, she said: "My dear child, you have always been such a blessing to me! What should I do without you?"

"Well, mother, now, if you feel able, just rest on my shoulder, and Tina will take the bundle. You take it, Tina, and we 'll find a place to rest."

And so, slowly and with difficulty, the three wound their way up to the grassy top of the hill where stood the red house. This house belonged to a man named Caleb Smith, whose character had caused the name he bore to degenerate into another which was held to be descriptive of his nature, namely, "Crab;" and the boys of the vicinity commonly expressed the popular idea of the man by calling him "Old Crab Smith." His was one of those sour, cross, gnarly natures that now and then are to be met with in New England, which, like knotty cider-apples, present a compound of hardness, sourness, and bitterness. It was affirmed that a continual free indulgence in very hard cider as a daily beverage was one great cause of this churlishness of temper; but be that as it may, there was not a boy in the village that did not know and take account of it in all his estimates and calculations, as much as of northeast storms and rainy weather. No child ever willingly carried a message to him; no neighbor but dreaded to ask a favor of him; nobody hoped to borrow or beg of him; nobody willingly hired themselves out to him, or did him cheerful service. In short, he was a petrified man, walled out from all neighborhood sympathies, and standing alone in his crabbedness. And it was to this man's house that the wandering orphan boy was leading his poor sick mother.

The three travelers approached a neat back porch on the shady side of the house, where an old woman sat knitting. This was Old Crab Smith's wife, or, more properly speaking, his life-long bond-slave, — the only human being

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whom he could so secure to himself that she should be always at hand for him to vent that residue of ill-humor upon which the rest of the world declined to receive. Why half the women in the world marry the men they do is a problem that might puzzle any philosopher; how any woman could marry Crab Smith was the standing wonder of all the neighborhood. And yet Crab's wife was a modest, industrious, kindly creature, who uncomplainingly toiled from morning till night to serve and please him, and received her daily allowance of grumbling and fault-finding with quiet submission. She tried all she could to mediate between him and the many whom his ill-temper was constantly provoking. She did surreptitious acts of kindness here and there, to do away the effects of his hardness, and shrunk and quivered for fear of being detected in goodness, as much as many another might for fear of being discovered in sin. She had been many times a mother, — had passed through all the trials and weaknesses of maternity without one tender act of consideration, one encouraging word. Her children had grown up and gone from her, always eager to leave the bleak, ungenial home, and go out to shift for themselves in the world, and now, in old age, she was still working. Worn to a shadow, — little, old, wrinkled, bowed, — she was still about the daily round of toil, and still the patient recipient of the murmurs and chidings of her tyrant.

"My mother is so sick she can't get any farther," said a little voice from under the veranda; "won't you let her come in and lie down awhile?"

"Massy, child," said the little old woman, coming forward with a trembling, uncertain step. "Well, she does look beat eout, to be sure. Come up and rest ye a bit."

"If you 'll only let me lie down awhile and rest me," said a faint, sweet voice.

"Come up here," said the old woman, standing quiver-

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ing like a gray shadow on the top doorstep; and, shading her wrinkled forehead with her hand, she looked with a glance of habitual apprehension along the road where the familiar cart and oxen of her tyrant might be expected soon to appear on their homeward way, and rejoiced in her little old heart that he was safe out of sight. "Yes, come in," she said, opening the door of a small ground-floor bedroom that adjoined the apartment known in New England houses as the sink-room, and showing them a plain bed.

The worn and wasted stranger sunk down on it, and, as she sunk, her whole remaining strength seemed to collapse, and something white and deathly fell, as if it had been a shadow, over her face.

"Massy to us! she 's fainted clean away," said the poor old woman, quiveringly. "I must jest run for the camphire."

The little boy seemed to have that unchildlike judgment and presence of mind that are the precocious development of want and sorrow. He ran to a water-pail, and, dipping his small tin cup, he dashed the water in his mother's face, and fanned her with his little torn straw hat. When the old woman returned, the invalid was breathing again, and able to take a few swallows of camphor and water which had been mixed for her.

"Sonny," said the old woman, "you are a nice little nurse, — a good boy. You jest take care now; and here 's a turkey-feather fan to fan her with; and I 'll get on the kettle to make her a cup of tea. We 'll bring her round with a little nursing. Been walking a long way, I calculate?"

"Yes," said the boy, "she was trying to get to Boston."

"What, going afoot?"

"We did n't mind walking, the weather is so pleasant," said the boy; "and Tina and I like walking; but mother

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got sick a day or two ago, and ever since she has been so tired!"

"Jes' so," said the old woman, looking compassionately on the bed. "Well, I'll make up the fire and get her some tea."

The fire was soon smoking in the great, old-fashioned kitchen chimney, for the neat, labor-saving cook-stove had as yet no being; and the thin, blue smoke, curling up in the rosy sunset air, received prismatic coloring which a painter would have seized with enthusiasm. Far otherwise, however, was its effect on the eye of Old Crab Smith, as, coming up the hill, his eye detected the luminous vapor going up from his own particular chimney.

"So, burning out wood, — always burning out wood. I told her that I would n't have tea got at night. These old women are crazy and bewitched after tea, and they don't care if they burn up your tables and chairs to help their messes. Why a plague can't she eat cold pork and potatoes as well as I, and drink her mug of cider; but must go to getting up her fire and biling her kettle? I'll see to that. Halloa there," he said, as he stamped up on to the porch, "what the devil you up to now? I s'pose you think I hain't got nothing else to do but split up wood for you to burn out."

"Father, it 's nothing but a little brush and a few chips, jest to bile the kettle."

"Bile the kettle, bile the kettle! Jest like yer lazy, shif'less ways. What must you be a-bilin' the kettle for?"

"Father, I jest want to make a little tea for a sick woman."

"A sick woman! What sick woman?"

"There was a poor sick woman came along this afternoon with two little children."

"Wal, I s'pose you took 'em in. I s'pose you think

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we keep the poor-house, and that all the trampers belong to us. We shall have to go to the poor-house ourselves before long, I tell ye. But you never believe anything I say. Why could n't you 'a' sent her to the selectmen? I don't know why I must keep beggars' tavern."

"Father, father, don't speak so loud. The poor critter wa'n't able to stir another step, and fainted dead away, and we had to get her on to a bed."

"And we shall have her and her two brats through a fit of sickness. That 's just like you. Wal, we shall all go to the poor-house together before long, and then you 'll believe what I say, won't ye? But I won't have it so. She may stay to-night, but to-morrow morning I 'll cart her over to Joe Scran's, bright and early, brats and all."

There was within hearing of this conversation a listener whose heart was dying within her, — sinking deeper and deeper at every syllable, — a few words will explain why.

A younger son of a family belonging to the English gentry had come over to America as a commissioned officer near the close of the Revolutionary war. He had persuaded to a private marriage the daughter of a poor country curate, a beautiful young girl, whom he induced to elope with him, and share the fortunes of an officer's life in America. Her parents died soon after; her husband proved a worthless, drunken, dissipated fellow; and this poor woman had been through all the nameless humiliations and agonies which beset helpless womanhood in the sole power of such a man. Submissive, gentle, trusting, praying, entreating, hoping against hope, she had borne with him many vicissitudes and reverses, — always believing that at last the love of his children, if not of her, would awaken a better nature within him. But the man steadily went downward instead of upward, and the better part of him by slow degrees died away, till he came to regard his wife and children only as so many clogs on his life, and to

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meditate night and day on a scheme to abandon them, and return, without their encumbrance, to his own country. It was with a distant outlook to some such result that he had from the first kept their marriage an entire secret from his own friends. When the English army, at the close of the war, reëmbarked for England, he carried his cowardly scheme into execution. He had boarded his wife and children for a season in a country farmhouse in the vicinity of Boston, with the excuse of cheapness of lodgings. Then one day his wife received a letter enclosing a sum of money, and saying, in such terms as bad men can find to veil devilish deeds, that all was over between them, and that ere she got this he should be on the ocean. The sorest hurt of all was that the letter denied the validity of their marriage; and the poor child found, to her consternation, that the marriage certificate, which she had always kept among her papers, was gone with her husband.

The first result of this letter had been a fit of sickness, wherein her little stock of money had melted almost away, and then she had risen from her bed determined to find her way to Boston, and learn, if possible, from certain persons with whom he had lodged before his departure, his address in England, that she might make one more appeal to him. But before she had walked far, the sickness returned upon her, till, dizzy and faint, she had lain down, as we have described, on the bed of charity.

She had thought, ever since she received that letter, that she had reached the bottom of desolation, — that nothing could be added to her misery; but the withering, harsh sounds which reached her ear revealed a lower deep in the lowest depths. Hitherto on her short travels she had met only that kindly country hospitality which New England, from one end to the other, always has shown to the stranger. No one had refused a good meal of brown bread and rich milk to her and her children, and more often the

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friendly housewife, moved by her delicate appearance, had unlocked the sanctum where was deposited her precious tea caddy, and brewed an amber cup of tea to sustain the sickly-looking wanderer. She and her children had been carried here and there, as occasion offered, a friendly mile or two, when Noah or Job or Sol "hitched up the critter" to go to mill or country store. The voice of harsh, pitiless rejection smote on her ear for the first time, and it seemed to her the drop too much in her cup. She turned her face to the wall and said, "O my God, I cannot bear this! I cannot, I cannot!" She would have said, "Let me die," but that she was tied to life by the two helpless, innocent ones who shared her misery. The poorest and most desolate mother feels that her little children are poorer and more desolate than she; and, however much her broken spirit may long for the rest of Paradise, she is held back by the thought that to abide in the flesh is needful to them. Even in her uttermost destitution the approaching shadow of the dark valley was a terror to the poor soul, — not for her own sake, but for theirs. The idea of a harsh, unpitiful world arose before her for the first time, and the thought of leaving her little ones in it unprotected was an anguish which rent her heart.

The little girl, over-weary, had eaten her supper and fallen asleep beside her, with the trusting, ignorant rest of early childhood; but her boy sat by her bedside with that look of precocious responsibility, that air of anxious thought, which seems unnatural in early childhood, and contrasted painfully with the slight childish figure, the little hands, and little voice. He was, as we have said, but nine years of age, well grown for his years, but with that style of growth which indicates delicacy of fibre rather than strength of organization. His finely formed head, with its clustering curls of yellow hair, his large, clear blue eyes, his exquisitely delicate skin, and the sensitiveness

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betrayed by his quivering lips, spoke of a lineage of gentle blood, and an organization fitted rather to æsthetic and intellectual development than to sturdy material toil. The little girl, as she lay sleeping, was a beautiful picture. Her head was a wilderness of curls of a golden auburn, and the defined penciling of the eyebrows, and the long silken veil of the lashes that fell over the sleeping eyes, the delicate polished skin and the finely moulded limbs, all indicated that she was one who ought to have been among the jewels, rather than among the potsherds of this mortal life. And these were the children that she was going to leave alone, without a single friend and protector in this world. For there are intuitions that come to the sick and dying which tell them when the end is near; and as this wanderer sunk down upon her bed this night, there had fallen upon her mind a perfect certainty that she should never be carried thence till carried to the grave; and it was this which had given her soul so deadly a wrench, and caused her to cry out in such utter agony.

What happens to desolate souls, who, thus forsaken by all the world, cry out to God, is a mystery, good brother and sister, which you can never fathom until you have been exactly where they are. But certain it is that there is a very near way to God's heart, and so to the great heart of all comfort, that sometimes opens like a shaft of light between heaven and the soul, in hours when everything earthly falls away from us. A quaint old writer has said, "God keeps his choicest cordials for the time of our deepest faintings." And so it came to pass that, as this poor woman closed her eyes and prayed earnestly, there fell a strange clearness into her soul, which calmed every fear, and hushed the voice of every passion, and she lay for a season as if entranced. Words of holy writ, heard years ago in church-readings, in the hours of unconscious girlhood, now seemed to come back, borne in with a living

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power on her soul. It seemed almost as if a voice within was saying to her, "The Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and thy foundations with sapphires. And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children."

It is fashionable now to speak of words like these as fragments of ancient Hebrew literature, interesting and curious indeed, but relating to scenes, events, and states of society long gone by. But it is a most remarkable property of this old Hebrew literature, that it seems to be enchanted with a divine and living power, which strikes the nerve of individual consciousness in every desolate and suffering soul. It may have been Judah or Jerusalem ages ago to whom these words first came, but as they have traveled down for thousands of years, they have seemed to tens of thousands of sinking and desolate souls as the voice of God to them individually. They have raised the burden from thousands of crushed spirits; they have been as the dayspring to thousands of perplexed wanderers. Ah! let us treasure these old words, for as of old Jehovah chose to dwell in a tabernacle in the wilderness, and between the cherubim in the temple, so now he dwells in them; and to the simple soul that seeks for him here he will look forth as of old from the pillar of cloud and of fire.

The poor, ill-used, forsaken, forgotten creature who lay there trembling on the verge of life felt the presence of that mighty and generous, that godlike spirit that inspired these words. And surely if Jehovah ever did speak to

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man, no words were ever more worthy of Him. She lay as in a blessed trance, as passage after passage from the Scriptures rolled over her mind, like bright waves from the ocean of eternal peace.

"Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour."

The little boy, who had heard his mother's first distressful cry, sat by her anxiously watching the changes of her face as she lay there. He saw her brow gradually grow clear and calm, and every line of trouble fade from her face, as shadows and clouds roll up from the landscape at day-dawn, till at last there was a rapt, peaceful expression, an evenness of breathing, as if she slept, and were dreaming some heavenly dream. It lasted for more than an hour, and the child sat watching her with the old, grave, tender look which had come to be the fashion of his little face when he looked upon his mother.

This boy had come to this mother as a second harvest of heart, hope, and joy, after the first great love and hope of womanhood had vanished. She felt herself broken-hearted, lonely, and unloved, when her first-born son was put into her arms, and she received him as did the first mother, saying, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." To him her desolate heart had unfolded its burden of confidence from the first dawning hours of intelligence. His tiny faculties had been widened to make room for her sorrows, and his childish strength increased by her leaning. There had been hours when this boy had stood between the maniac rage of a drunken father and the cowering form of his mother, with an unchildlike courage and steadiness that

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seemed almost like an inspiration. In days of desertion and poverty he had gone out with their slender stock of money and made bargains such as it is pitiful to think that a little child should know how to make; and often, in moments when his mother's heart was overwhelmed, he would come to her side with the little prayers and hymns which she had taught him, and revive her faith and courage when it seemed entirely gone.

Now, as he thought her sleeping, he began with anxious care to draw the coverlet over her, and to move his little sister back upon the bed. She opened her eyes, — large, clear blue eyes, the very mirror of his own, — and, smiling with a strange sweetness, stretched out her hand and drew him towards her. "Harry, my dear good boy, my dear, dear child, nobody knows what a comfort you have been to me."

Then holding him from her, and looking intently in his eyes, she seemed to hesitate for words to tell him something that lay on her mind. At last she said, "Harry, say your prayers and psalms."

The child knelt by the bed, with his hands clasped in his mother's, and said the Lord's Prayer, and then, standing up, repeated the beautiful psalm beginning, "The Lord is my shepherd." Then followed a hymn, which the Methodists had made familiar in those times: —

"One there is above all others
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end.

"Which of all our friends, to save us,
Could or would have shed his blood?
But this Saviour died to have us
Reconciled in him to God.

"When he lived on earth abasëd,
Friend of Sinners was his name;
Now, above all glory raisëd,
He rejoiceth in the same.

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"O for grace our hearts to soften!
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
We, alas! forget too often
What a friend we have above."

"Harry," said his mother, looking at him with an intense earnestness, "I want to tell you something. God, our Father, has called me to come home to him; and I am going. In a little while — perhaps to-morrow — I shall be gone, and you cannot find me. My soul will go to God, and they will put my body in the ground; and then you will have no friend but Jesus, and no father but the Father in heaven."

The child looked at her with solemn, dilated gaze, not really comprehending the full mystery of that which she was trying to explain; yet the tears starting in his eyes, and the twitching of the muscles of his mouth, showed that he partly understood.

"Mother," he said, "will papa never come back?"

"No, Harry, never. He has left us and gone away. He does not love us, — nobody loves us but our Father in heaven; but He does. You must always believe this. Now, Harry, I am going to leave your little sister to your care. You must always keep with her and take care of her, for she is a very little girl."

"Yes, mother."

"This is a great charge for a little boy like you; but you will live and grow up to be a man, and I want you never, as long as you live, to forget what I say to you now. Promise me, Harry, all your life to say these prayers and hymns that you have just been saying, every morning and every night. They are all I have to leave you; but if you only believe them, you will never be without comfort, no matter what happens to you. Promise me, dear."

"Yes, mother, I will."

"And, Harry, no matter *what* happens, never doubt that God loves you, — never forget that you have a Friend

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in heaven. Whenever you have a trouble, just pray to Him, and He will help you. Promise this."

"Yes, mother."

"Now lie down by me; I am very, very tired."

The little boy lay down by his mother; she threw her arms around him, and both sunk to sleep.

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CHAPTER VIII

MISS ASPHYXIA

"THERE won't be no great profit in this 'ere these ten year."

The object denominated "this 'ere" was the golden-haired child whom we have spoken of before, — the little girl whose mother lay dying. That mother is dead now; and the thing to be settled is, What is to be done with the children? The morning after the scene we have described looked in at the window and saw the woman, with a pale, placid face, sleeping as one who has found eternal rest, and the two weeping children striving in vain to make her hear.

Old Crab had been up early in his design of "carting the 'hull lot over to the poor-house," but made a solemn pause when his wife drew him into the little chamber. Death has a strange dignity, and whatsoever child of Adam he lays his hand on is for the time ennobled, — removed from the region of the earthly and commonplace to that of the spiritual and mysterious. And when Crab found, by searching the little bundle of the deceased, that there was actually money enough in it to buy a coffin and pay 'Zekiel Stebbins for digging the grave, he began to look on the woman as having made a respectable and edifying end, and the whole affair as coming to a better issue than he had feared.

And so the event was considered in the neighborhood, in a melancholy way, rather an interesting and auspicious one. It gave something to talk about in a region where

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exciting topics were remarkably scarce. The Reverend Jabez Periwinkle found in it a moving Providence which started him favorably on a sermon, and the funeral had been quite a windfall to all the gossips about; and now remained the question, What was to be done with the children?

"Now that we are diggin' the 'taters," said old Crab, "that 'ere chap might be good for suthin', pickin' on 'em out o' the hills. Poor folks like us can't afford to keep nobody jest to look at, and so he 'll have to step spry and work smart to airn his keep." And so at early dawn, the day after the funeral, the little boy was roused up and carried into the fields with the men.

But "this 'ere" — that is to say, a beautiful little girl of seven years — had greatly puzzled the heads of the worthy gossips of the neighborhood. Miss Asphyxia Smith, the elder sister of old Crab, was at this moment turning the child round, and examining her through a pair of large horn spectacles, with a view to "taking her to raise," as she phrased it.

Now all Miss Asphyxia's ideas of the purpose and aim of human existence were comprised in one word, — work. She was herself a working machine, always wound up and going, — up at early cock-crowing, and busy till bedtime, with a rampant and fatiguing industry that never paused for a moment. She conducted a large farm by the aid of a hired man, and drove a flourishing dairy, and was universally respected in the neighborhood as a smart woman.

Latterly, as her young cousin, who had shared the toils of the house with her, had married and left her, Miss Asphyxia had talked of "takin' a child from the poor-house, and so raisin' her own help;" and it was with the view of this "raisin' her help," that she was thus turning over and inspecting the little article which we have spoken of.

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Apparently she was somewhat puzzled, and rather scandalized, that Nature should evidently have expended so much in a merely ornamental way on an article which ought to have been made simply for service. She brushed up a handful of the clustering curls in her large, bony hand, and said, with a sniff, "These 'll have to come right off to begin with; gracious me, what a tangle!"

"Mother always brushed them out every day," said the child.

"And who do you suppose is going to spend an hour every day brushing your hair, Miss Pert?" said Miss Asphyxia. "That ain't what I take ye for, I tell you. You've got to learn to work for your living; and you ought to be thankful if I'm willing to show you how."

The little girl did not appear particularly thankful. She bent her soft, penciled eyebrows in a dark frown, and her great hazel eyes had gathering in them a cloud of sullen gloom. Miss Asphyxia did not mind her frowning, — perhaps did not notice it. She had it settled in her mind, as a first principle, that children never liked anything that was good for them, and that, of course, if she took a child, it would have to be made to come to her by forcible proceedings promptly instituted. So she set her little subject before her by seizing her by her two shoulders and squaring her round and looking in her face, and opened direct conversation with her in the following succinct manner.

"What's your name?"

Then followed a resolved and gloomy silence, as the large bright eyes surveyed, with a sort of defiant glance, the inquisitor.

"Don't you hear?" said Miss Asphyxia, giving her a shake.

"Don't be so ha'sh with her," said the little old woman. "Say, my little dear, tell Miss Asphyxia your name," she added, taking the child's hand.

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"Eglantine Percival," said the little girl, turning towards the old woman, as if she disdained to answer the other party in the conversation.

"Wh—a—t?" said Miss Asphyxia, "If there ain't the beatin'est name ever I heard. Well, I tell you *I* ain't got time to fix *my* mouth to say all that 'ere every time I want ye, now I tell ye."

"Mother and Harry called me Tina," said the child.

"Teny! Well, I should think so," said Miss Asphyxia. "That showed she 'd got a grain o' sense left, anyhow. She 's tol'able strong and well-limbed for her age," added that lady, feeling of the child's arms and limbs; "her flesh is solid. I think she 'll make a strong woman, only put her to work early and keep her at it. I could rub out clothes at the wash-tub afore I was at her age."

"Oh, she can do considerable many little chores," said Old Crab's wife.

"Yes," said Miss Asphyxia; "there can a good deal be got out of a child if you keep at 'em, hold 'em in tight, and never let 'em have their head a minute; push right hard on behind 'em, and you get considerable. That 's the way I was raised."

"But I want to play," said the little girl, bursting out in a sobbing storm of mingled fear and grief.

"Want to play, do you? Well, you must get over that. Don't you know that that 's as bad as stealing? You haven 't got any money, and if you eat folks' bread and butter, you 've got to work to pay for it; and if folks buy your clothes, you 've got to work to pay for them."

"But I 've got some clothes of my own," persisted the child, determined not to give up her case entirely.

"Well, so you have; but there ain't no sort of wear in 'em," said Miss Asphyxia, turning to Mrs. Smith. "Them two dresses o' her'n might answer for Sundays and sich, but I 'll have to make her up a regular linsey working dress

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this fall, and check aprons; and she must set right about knitting every minute she is n't doing anything else. Did you ever learn how to knit?"

"No," said the child.

"Or to sew?" said Miss Asphyxia.

"Yes; mother taught me to sew," said the child.

"No! Yes! Hain't you learned manners? Do you say yes and no to people?"

The child stood a moment, swelling with suppressed feeling, and at last she opened her great eyes full on Miss Asphyxia, and said, "I don't like you. You ain't pretty, and I won't go with you."

"Oh, now," said Mrs. Smith, "little girls must n't talk so; that 's naughty."

"Don't like me? — ain't I pretty?" said Miss Asphyxia, with a short, grim laugh. "May be I ain't; but I know what I 'm about, and you 'd as goods know it first as last. I 'm going to take ye right out with me in the waggin, and you 'd best not have none of your cuttin's up. I keep a stick at home for naughty girls. Why, where do you suppose you 're going to get your livin' if I don't take you?"

"I want to live with Harry," said the child, sobbing. "Where is Harry?"

"Harry 's to work, — and there 's where he 's got to be," said Miss Asphyxia. "He 's got to work with the men in the fields, and you 've got to come home and work with me."

"I want to stay with Harry, — Harry takes care of me," said the child, in a piteous tone.

Old Mother Smith now toddled to her milk-room, and, with a melting heart, brought out a doughnut. "There now, eat that," she said; "and mebbe, if you 're good, Miss Asphyxia will bring you down here some time."

"Oh laws, Polly, you allers was a fool!" said Miss Asphyxia. "It 's all for the child's good, and what 's the

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use of fussin' on her up? She'll come to it when she knows she's got to. 'T ain't no more than I was put to at her age, only the child 's been fooled with and babied."

The little one refused the doughnut, and seemed to gather herself up in silent gloom.

"Come, now, don't stand sulking; let me put your bonnet on," said Miss Asphyxia, in a brisk, metallic voice. "I can't be losin' the best part of my day with this nonsense!" And forthwith she clawed up the child in her bony grasp, as easily as an eagle might truss a chick-sparrow.

"Be a good little girl, now," said the little gray woman, who felt a strange swelling and throbbing in her poor old breast. To be sure, she knew she was a fool; her husband had told her so at least three times every day for years; and Miss Asphyxia only confirmed what she accepted familiarly as the truth. But yet she could not help these unprofitable longings to coddle and comfort something, — to do some of those little motherly tendernesses for children which go to no particular result, only to make them happy; so she ran out after the wagon with a tempting seed-cake, and forced it into the child's hand.

"Take it, do take it," she said; "eat it, and be a good girl, and do just as she tells you to."

"I'll see to that," said Miss Asphyxia, as she gathered up the reins and gave a cut to her horse, which started that quadruped from a dream of green grass into a most animated pace. Every creature in her service — horse, cow, and pig — knew at once the touch of Miss Asphyxia, and the necessity of being up and doing when she was behind them; and the horse, who under other hands would have been the slowest and most reflective of beasts, now made the little wagon spin and bounce over the rough, stony road, so that the child's short legs flew up in the air every few moments.

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"You must hold on tight," was Miss Asphyxia's only comment on this circumstance. "If you fall out, you 'll break your neck!"

It was a glorious day of early autumn, the sun shining as only an autumn sun knows how to shine. The blue fields of heaven were full of fleecy flocks of clouds, drifting hither and thither at their lazy will. The goldenrod and the aster hung their plumage over the rough, rocky road; and now and then it wound through a sombre piece of woods, where scarlet sumachs and maples flashed out among the gloomy green hemlocks with a solemn and gorgeous light. So very fair was the day, and so full of life and beauty was the landscape, that the child, who came of a beauty-loving lineage, felt her little heart drawn out from under its burden of troubles, and springing and bounding with that elastic habit of happiness which seems hard to kill in children.

Once she laughed out as a squirrel, with his little chops swelled with a nut on each side, sat upon the fence and looked after them, and then whisked away behind the stone wall; and once she called out, "Oh, how pretty!" at a splendid clump of blue fringed gentian, which stood holding up its hundred azure vases by the wayside. "Oh, I do wish I could get some of that!" she cried out, impulsively.

"Some of what?" said Miss Asphyxia.

"Oh, those beautiful flowers!" said the child, leaning far out to look back.

"Oh, that 's nothing but gentian," said Miss Asphyxia; "can't stop for that. Them blows is good to dry for weakness," she added. "By and by, if you 're good, mebbe I 'll let you get some on 'em."

Miss Asphyxia had one word for all flowers. She called them all "blows," and they were divided in her mind, in a manner far more simple than any botanical system, into two classes; namely, blows that were good to dry,

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and blows that were not. Elder-blow, catnip, hoarhound, hardhack, gentian, ginseng, and various other vegetable tribes, she knew well and had a great respect for; but all the other little weeds that put on obtrusive colors and flaunted in the summer breeze, without any pretensions to further usefulness, Miss Asphyxia completely ignored. It would not be describing her state to say she had a contempt for them: she simply never saw or thought of them at all. The idea of beauty as connected with any of them never entered her mind, — it did not exist there.

The young cousin who shared her housework had, to be sure, planted a few flowers in a corner of the garden; there were some peonies and pinks and a rose-bush, which often occupied a spare hour of the girl's morning or evening; but Miss Asphyxia watched these operations with a sublime contempt, and only calculated the loss of potatoes and carrots caused by this unproductive beauty. Since the marriage of this girl, Miss Asphyxia had often spoken to her man about "clearing out them things;" but somehow he always managed to forget it, and the thriftless beauties still remained.

It wanted but about an hour of noon when Miss Asphyxia set down the little girl on the clean-scrubbed floor of a great kitchen, where everything was even desolately orderly and neat. She swung her at once into a chair. "Sit there," she said, "till I 'm ready to see to ye." And then, marching up to her own room, she laid aside her bonnet, and coming down, plunged into active preparations for the dinner.

An irrepressible feeling of desolation came over the child. The elation produced by the ride died away; and, as she sat dangling her heels from the chair, and watching the dry, grim form of Miss Asphyxia, a sort of terror of her began slowly to usurp the place of that courage which had at first inspired the child to rise up against the assertion of so uncongenial a power.

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All the strange, dreadful events of the last few days mingled themselves, in her childish mind, in a weird mass of uncomprehended gloom and mystery. Her mother, so changed, — cold, stiff, lifeless, neither smiling nor speaking nor looking at her; the people coming to the house, and talking and singing and praying, and then putting her in a box in the ground, and saying that she was dead; and then, right upon that, to be torn from her brother, to whom she had always looked for protection and counsel, — all this seemed a weird, inexplicable cloud coming over her heart and darkening all her little life. Where was Harry? Why did he let them take her? Or perhaps equally dreadful people had taken him, and would never bring him back again.

There was a tall black clock in a corner of the kitchen, that kept its invariable monotone of tick-tack, tick-tack, with a persistence that made her head swim; and she watched the quick, decisive movements of Miss Asphyxia with somewhat of the same respectful awe with which one watches the course of a locomotive engine.

It was late for Miss Asphyxia's dinner preparations, but she instituted prompt measures to make up for lost time. She flew about the kitchen with such long-armed activity and fearful celerity, that the child began instinctively to duck and bob her little head when she went by, lest she should hit her and knock her off her chair.

Miss Asphyxia raked open the fire in the great kitchen chimney, and built it up with a liberal supply of wood; then she rattled into the back room, and a sound was heard of a bucket descending into a well with such frantic haste as only an oaken bucket under Miss Asphyxia's hands could be frightened into. Back she came with a stout black iron tea-kettle, which she hung over the fire; and then, flopping down a ham on the table, she cut off slices with a martial and determined air, as if she would like to

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see the ham try to help itself; and, before the child could fairly see what she was doing, the slices of ham were in the frying-pan over the coals, the ham hung up in its place, the knife wiped and put out of sight, and the table drawn out into the middle of the floor, and invested with a cloth for dinner.

During these operations the child followed every movement with awestruck eyes, and studied with trembling attention every feature of this wonderful woman.

Miss Asphyxia was tall and spare. Nature had made her, as she often remarked of herself, entirely for use. She had allowed for her muscles no cushioned repose of fat, no redundant smoothness of outline. There was nothing to her but good, strong, solid bone, and tough, wiry, well-strung muscle. She was past fifty, and her hair was already well streaked with gray, and so thin that, when tightly combed and tied, it still showed bald cracks, not very sightly to the eye. The only thought that Miss Asphyxia ever had had in relation to the *coiffure* of her hair was that it was to be got out of her way. Hair she considered principally as something that might get into people's eyes, if not properly attended to; and accordingly, at a very early hour every morning, she tied all hers in a very tight knot, and then secured it by a horn comb on the top of her head. To tie this knot so tightly that, once done, it should last all day, was Miss Asphyxia's only art of the toilet, and she tried her work every morning by giving her head a shake, before she left her looking-glass, not unlike that of an unruly cow. If this process did not start the horn comb from its moorings, Miss Asphyxia was well pleased. For the rest, her face was dusky and wilted, — guarded by gaunt, high cheek-bones, and watched over by a pair of small gray eyes of unsleeping vigilance. The shaggy eyebrows that overhung them were grizzled, like her hair.

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It would not be proper to say that Miss Asphyxia looked ill-tempered; but her features could never, by any stretch of imagination, be supposed to wear an expression of tenderness. They were set in an austere, grim gravity, whose lines had become more deeply channeled by every year of her life. As related to her fellow-creatures, she was neither passionate nor cruel. We have before described her as a working machine, forever wound up to high-pressure working-point; and this being her nature, she trod down and crushed whatever stood in the way of her work, with as little compunction as if she had been a steam-engine or a power-loom.

Miss Asphyxia had a full conviction of what a recent pleasant writer has denominated the total depravity of matter. She was not given to many words, but it might often be gathered from her brief discourses that she had always felt herself, so to speak, sword in hand against a universe where everything was running to disorder, — everything was tending to slackness, shiftlessness, unthrift, and she alone was left on the earth to keep things in their places. Her hired men were always too late up in the morning, — always shirking, — always taking too long a nap at noon; everybody was watching to cheat her in every bargain; her horse, cow, pigs, — all her possessions, — were ready at the slightest winking of her eye, or relaxing of her watch, to fall into all sorts of untoward ways and gyrations; and therefore she slept, as it were, in her armor, and spent her life as a sentinel on duty.

In taking a child, she had had her eyes open only to one patent fact, — that a child was an animal who would always be wanting to play, and that she must make all her plans and calculations to keep her from playing. To this end she had beforehand given out word to her brother, that, if she took the girl, the boy must be kept away. "Got enough on my hands now, without havin' a boy

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trainin' round my house, and upsettin' all creation," said the grim virgin.

"Wal, wal," said Old Crab, "'t ain't best; they 'll be a consultin' together, and cuttin' up didos. I 'll keep the boy tight enough, I tell you."

Little enough was the dinner that the child ate that day. There were two hulking, square-shouldered men at the table, who stared at her with great round eyes like oxen; and so, though Miss Asphyxia dumped down Indian pudding, ham, and fried potatoes before her, the child's eating was scarcely that of a blackbird.

Marvelous to the little girl was the celerity with which Miss Asphyxia washed and cleared up the dinner-dishes. How the dishes rattled, the knives and forks clinked, as she scraped and piled and washed and wiped and put everything in a trice back into such perfect place, that it looked as if nothing had ever been done on the premises!

After this Miss Asphyxia produced thimble, thread, needle, and scissors, and, drawing out of a closet a bale of coarse blue home-made cloth, proceeded to measure the little girl for a petticoat and short gown of the same. This being done to her mind, she dumped her into a chair beside her, and, putting a brown towel into her hands to be hemmed, she briefly said, "There, keep to work;" while she, with great dispatch and resolution, set to work on the little garments aforesaid.

The child once or twice laid down her work to watch the chickens that came up round the door, or to note a bird which flew by with a little ripple of song. The first time, Miss Asphyxia only frowned, and said, "Tut, tut." The second time, there came three thumps of Miss Asphyxia's thimble down on the little head, with the admonition, "Mind your work." The child now began to cry, but Miss Asphyxia soon put an end to that by displaying a long birch rod, with a threatening movement, and saying

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succinctly, "Stop that, this minute, or I'll whip you." And the child was so certain of this that she swallowed her grief and stitched away as fast as her little fingers could go.

As soon as supper was over that night, Miss Asphyxia seized upon the child, and, taking her to a tub in the sink-room, proceeded to divest her of her garments and subject her to a most thorough ablution.

"I'm goin' to give you one good scrubbin' to start with," said Miss Asphyxia; and, truth to say, no word could more thoroughly express the character of the ablution than the term "scrubbing." The poor child was deluged with soap and water, in mouth, nose, ears, and eyes, while the great bony hands rubbed and splashed, twisted her arms, turned her ears wrong side out, and dashed on the water with unsparing vigor. Nobody can tell the torture which can be inflicted on a child in one of these vigorous old New England washings, which used to make Saturday night a terror in good families. But whatever they were, the little martyr was by this time so thoroughly impressed with the awful reality of Miss Asphyxia's power over her that she endured all with only a few long-drawn and convulsed sighs, and an inaudible "Oh dear!"

When well scrubbed and wiped, Miss Asphyxia put on a coarse homespun nightgown, and, pinning a cloth round the child's neck, began with her scissors the work of cutting off her hair. Snip, snip, went the fatal shears, and down into the towel fell bright curls, once the pride of a mother's heart, till finally the small head was despoiled completely. Then Miss Asphyxia, shaking up a bottle of camphor, proceeded to rub some vigorously upon the child's head. "There," she said, "that 's to keep ye from catchin' cold."

She then proceeded to the kitchen, raked open the fire, and shook the golden curls into the bed of embers, and

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stood grimly over them while they seethed and twisted and writhed, as if they had been living things suffering a fiery torture, meanwhile picking diligently at the cloth that had contained them, that no stray hair might escape.

"I wonder now," she said to herself, "if any of this will rise and get into the next pudding?" She spoke with a spice of bitterness, poor woman, as if it would be just the way things usually went on, if it did.

She buried the fire carefully, and then, opening the door of a small bedroom adjoining, which displayed a single bed, she said, "Now get into bed."

The child immediately obeyed, thankful to hide herself under the protecting folds of a blue checked coverlet, and feeling that at last the dreadful Miss Asphyxia would leave her to herself.

Miss Asphyxia clapped to the door, and the child drew a long breath. In a moment, however, the door flew open. Miss Asphyxia had forgotten something. "Can you say your prayers?" she demanded.

"Yes, ma'am," said the child.

"Say 'em, then," said Miss Asphyxia; and bang went the door again.

"There, now, if I hain't done up my duty to that child, then I don't know," said Miss Asphyxia.

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CHAPTER IX

HARRY'S FIRST DAY'S WORK

It was the fashion of olden times to consider children only as children pure and simple; not as having any special and individual nature which required special and individual adaptation, but as being simply so many little creatures to be washed, dressed, schooled, fed, and whipped, according to certain general and well-understood rules.

The philosophy of modern society is showing to parents and educators how delicate and how varied is their task; but in the days we speak of nobody had thought of these shadings and variations. It is perhaps true, that in that very primitive and simple state of society there were fewer of those individual peculiarities which are the result of the stimulated brains and nervous systems of modern society.

Be that as it may, the little parish of Needmore saw nothing in the fact that two orphan children had fallen into the hands of Crab Smith and his sister, Miss Asphyxia, which appeared to its moral sense as at all unsuitable. To be sure, there was a suppressed shrug of the shoulders at the idea of the little fair-haired, pleasant-mannered boy being given up to Old Crab. People said to each other, with a knowing grin: "That 'ere boy 'd have to toe the mark pretty handsome; but then, he might do wus. He 'd have enough to eat and drink anyhow, and old Ma'am Smith, she 'd mother him. As to Miss Asphyxia and the girl, why, 't was jest the thing. She was jest the hand to raise a smart girl."

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In fact, we are not certain that Miss Asphyxia, with a few modifications and fashionable shadings suitable for our modern society, is not, after all, the ideal personage who would get all votes as just the proper person to take charge of an orphan asylum, — would be recommended to widowers with large families as just the woman to bring up their children.

Efficiency has always been, in our New England, the golden calf before which we have fallen down and worshiped. The great granite formation of physical needs and wants that underlie life in a country with a hard soil and a severe climate gives an intensity to our valuation of what pertains to the working of the direct and positive force that controls the physical; and that which can keep in constant order the eating, drinking, and wearing of this mortal body is always asserting itself in every department of life as the true wisdom.

But what, in fact, were the two little children who had been thus seized on and appropriated?

The boy was, as we have described, of a delicate and highly nervous organization, — sensitive, æsthetic, — evidently fitted by nature more for the poet or scholar than for the rough grind of physical toil. There had been superinduced on this temperament a precocious development from the circumstance of his having been made, during the earliest years of his consciousness, the companion of his mother. Nothing unfolds a child faster than being thus taken into the companionship of older minds in the first years of life. He was naturally one of those manly, good-natured, even-tempered children that are the delight of nurses and the staff and stay of mothers. Early responsibility and sorrow, and the religious teachings of his mother, had awakened the spiritual part of his nature to a higher consciousness than usually exists in childhood. There was about him a steady, uncorrupted goodness and

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faithfulness of nature, a simple, direct truthfulness, and a loyal habit of prompt obedience to elders, which made him one of those children likely, in every position of child-life, to be favorites, and to run a smooth course.

The girl, on the contrary, had in her all the elements of a little bundle of womanhood, born to rule and command in a pure womanly way. She was affectionate, gay, pleasure-loving, self-willed, imperious, intensely fond of approbation, with great stores of fancy, imagination, and an under-heat of undeveloped passion that would, in future life, give warmth and color to all her thoughts, as a volcanic soil is said to brighten the hues of flowers and warm the flavor of grapes. She had, too, that capacity of secretiveness which enabled her to carry out the dictates of a strong will, and an intuitive sense of where to throw a tendril or strike a little fibre of persuasion or coaxing, which comes early to those fair parasites who are to live by climbing upon others, and to draw their hues and sweetness from the warmth of other hearts. The moral and religious faculties were as undeveloped in her as in a squirrel or a robin. She had lived, in fact, between her sorrowing mother and her thoughtful little brother, as a beautiful pet, whose little gladsome ways and gay pranks were the only solace of their poverty. Even the father, in good-natured hours, had caressed her, played with her, told her stories, and allowed all her little audacities and liberties with an indulgence that her brother could not dare to hope for. No service or self-denial had ever been required of her. She had been served, with a delicate and exact care, by both mother and brother.

Such were the two little specimens of mortality which the town of Needmore thought well provided for when they were consigned to Crab Smith and Miss Asphyxia.

The first day after the funeral of his mother, the boy had been called up before light in the morning, and been

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off at sunrise to the fields with the men; but he had gone with a heart of manly enterprise, feeling as if he were beginning life on his own account, and meaning, with straightforward simplicity, to do his best. He assented to Old Crab's harsh orders with such obedient submission, and set about the work given him with such a steady, manly patience and good-will, as to win for himself, at the outset, golden opinions from the hired men, and to excite in Old Crab that discontented satisfaction which he felt in an employee in whom he could find nothing to scold. The work of merely picking up the potatoes from the hills which the men opened was so very simple as to give no chance for mistake or failure, and the boy was so cheerful and unintermitting in his work that no fault could be found under that head. He was tired enough, it is true, at night; but, as he rode home in the cart, he solaced himself with the idea that he was beginning to be a man, and that he should work and support his sister, — and he had many things to tell her of the result of his first day's labor. He wondered that she did not come to meet him as the cart drove up to the house, and his first inquiry, when he saw the friendly old woman, was, "Where is Tina?"

"She 's gone to live with *his* sister," said Mrs. Smith, in an undertone, pointing to her husband in the back yard. "Asphyxia 's took her to raise."

"To what?" said the boy, timidly.

"Why, to fetch her up, — teach her to work," said the little old woman. "But come, sonny, go wash your hands to the sink. Dear me! why, you 've fairly took the skin off your fingers."

"I 'm not much used to work," said the boy, "but I don't mind it." And he washed carefully the little hands, which, sure enough, had the skin somewhat abraded on the finger-ends.

"Do ye good," said Old Crab. "Must n't mind that. Can't have no lily-fingered boys workin' for me."

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The child had not thought of complaining; but as soon as he was alone with Mrs. Smith, he came to her confidentially and said, "How far is it to where Tina lives?"

"Well, it 's the best part of two miles, I calculate."

"Can't I go over there to-night and see her?"

"Dear heart! no, you can't. Why, your little back must ache now, and he 'll have you routed up by four o'clock in the morning."

"I 'm not so very tired," said the boy; "but I want to see Tina. If you 'll show me the way, I 'll go."

"Oh, well, you see, they won't let you," said the old woman, confidentially. "They are a ha'sh pair of 'em, him and Sphyxy are; and they 've settled it that you ain't to see each other no more, for fear you 'd get to playin' and idlin'."

The blood flushed into the boy's face, and he breathed short. Something stirred within him, such as makes slavery bitter, as he said, "But that is n't right. She 's my only sister, and my mother told me to take care of her; and I ought to see her sometimes."

"Lordy massy!" said Goody Smith; "when you 're with some folks, it don't make no difference what 's right and what ain't. You 've jest got to do as ye ken. It won't do to rile *him*, I tell you. He 's awful, once git his back up." And Goody Smith shook her little old head mysteriously, and hushed the boy, as she heard her husband's heavy tread coming in from the barn.

The supper of cold beef and pork, potatoes, turnips, and hard cider, which was now dispensed at the farmhouse, was ample for all purposes of satisfying hunger; and the little Harry, tired as he was, ate with a vigorous relish. But his mind was still dwelling on his sister.

After supper was over he followed Goody Smith into her milk-room. "Please do ask *him* to let me go and see Tina," he said, persuasively.

"Laws a massy, ye poor dear! ye don't know the crit-

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ter. If *I* ask him to do a thing, he 's all the more set agin it. I found out that 'ere years ago. He never does nothin' *I* ask him to. But never mind; some of these days, we 'll try and contrive it. When he 's gone to mill, I 'll speak to the men, and tell 'em to let ye slip off. But then the pester on 't is, there 's Sphyxy; she 's allers wide awake, and would n't let a boy come near her house no more than ef he was a bulldog."

"Why, what harm do boys do?" said the child, to whom this view presented an entirely new idea.

"Oh, well, she 's an old maid, and kind o' set in her ways; and it ain't easy gettin' round Sphyxy; but I 'll try and contrive it. Sometimes I can get round 'em, and get something done, when they don't know nothin' about it; but it 's dreffful hard gettin' things done."

The view thus presented to the child's mind of the cowering, deceptive policy in which the poor old woman's whole married life had been spent gave him much to think of after he had gone to his bedroom.

He sat down on his little, lonely bed, and began trying to comprehend in his own mind the events of the last few days. He recalled his mother's last conversation with him. All had happened just as she had said. She was gone, just as she had told him, and left him and little Tina alone in the world. Then he remembered his promise, and, kneeling down by his bedside, repeated the simple litany — psalm, prayer, and hymn — which his mother had left him as her only parting gift. The words soothed his little lonesome heart; and he thought what his mother said, — he recalled the look of her dying eyes as she said it, — "Never doubt that God loves you, whatever happens; and, if you have any trouble, pray to him." Upon this thought, he added to his prayer these words: "O dear Father! they have taken away Tina; and she 's a very little girl, and cannot work, as I can. Please do take care of Tina, and make them let me go and see her."

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CHAPTER X

MISS ASPHYXIA'S SYSTEM

When Miss Asphyxia shut the door finally on little Tina, the child began slowly to gather up her faculties from the stunning, benumbing influence of the change which had come over her life.

In former days her father had told her stories of little girls that were carried off to giants' houses, and there maltreated and dominated over in very dreadful ways; and Miss Asphyxia presented herself to her as one of these giants. She was so terribly strong, the child felt instinctively, in every limb, that there was no getting away from her. Her eyes were so keen and searching, her voice so sharp, all her movements so full of a vigor that might be felt, that any chance of getting the better of her by indirect ways seemed hopelessly small. If she should try to run away to find Harry, she was quite sure that Miss Asphyxia could make a long arm that would reach her before she had gone far; and then what she would do to her was a matter that she dared not think of. Even when she was not meaning to be cross to her, but merely seized and swung her into a chair, she had such a grip that it almost gave pain; and what would it be if she seized her in wrath? No; there was evidently no escape; and, as the thought came over the child, she began to cry, — first sobbing, and then, as her agitation increased, screaming audibly.

Miss Asphyxia opened the door. "Stop that!" she said. "What under the canopy ails ye?"

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"I — want — Harry!" said the child.

"Well, you can't have Harry; and I won't have ye bawling. Now shut up and go to sleep, or I'll whip you!" And, with that, Miss Asphyxia turned down the bedclothes with a resolute hand.

"I will be good, — I will stop," said the child, in mortal terror, compressing the sobs that seemed to tear her little frame.

Miss Asphyxia waited a moment, and then, going out, shut the door, and went on making up the child's stuff gown outside.

"That 'ere's goin' to be a regular limb," she said; "but I must begin as I'm goin' to go on with her, and mebbe she'll amount to suthin' by and by. A child's pretty much dead loss the first three or four years; but after that they more 'n pay, if they're fetched up right."

"Mebbe that 'ere child's lonesome," said Sol Peters, Miss Asphyxia's hired man, who sat in the kitchen corner, putting in a new hoe-handle.

"Lonesome!" said Miss Asphyxia, with a sniff of contempt.

"All sorts of young critters is," said Sol, undismayed by this sniff. "Puppies is. 'Member how our Spot yelped when I fust got him? Kept me 'wake the biggest part of one night. And kittens mews when ye take 'em from the cats. Ye see they's used to other critters; and it's sort o' cold like, bein' alone is."

"Well, she'll have to get used to it, anyhow," said Miss Asphyxia. "I guess 't won't kill her. Ef a child has enough to eat and drink, and plenty of clothes, and somebody to take care of 'em, they ain't very bad off, if they be lonesome."

Sol, though a big-fisted, hard-handed fellow, had still rather a soft spot under his jacket in favor of all young, defenseless animals, and the sound of the little girl's cry

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had gone right to this spot. So he still revolved the subject, as he leisurely turned and scraped with a bit of broken glass the hoe-handle that he was elaborating. After a considerable pause, he shut up one eye, looked along his hoe-handle at Miss Asphyxia, as if he were taking aim, and remarked, "That 'ere boy 's a nice, stiddy little chap; and mebbe, if he could come down here once and a while after work-hours, 't would kind o' reconcile her."

"I tell you what, Solomon Peters," said Miss Asphyxia, "I 'd jest as soon have the great red dragon in the Revelations a-comin' down on my house as a boy! Ef I don't work hard enough now, I 'd like to know, without havin' a boy raound raisin' gineral Cain. Don't tell me! I 'll find work enough to keep that 'ere child from bein' lonesome. Lonesome! — there did n't nobody think of no such things when I was little. I was jest put right along, and no remarks made; and was made to mind when I was spoken to, and to take things as they come. Oh, I 'll find her work enough to keep her mind occupied, I promise ye."

Sol did not in the least doubt that, for Miss Asphyxia's reputation in the region was perfectly established. She was spoken of with applause under such titles as "a staver," "a pealer," "a roarer to work;" and Sol himself had an awful sense of responsibility to her in this regard. He had arrived at something of a late era in single life, and had sometimes been sportively jogged by his associates, at the village store, as to his opportunity of becoming master of Miss Asphyxia's person and property by matrimonial overtures; to all which he summarily responded by declaring that "a hoss might as soon go a-courtin' to the hoss-whip as he court Miss Sphyxy." As to Miss Asphyxia, when rallied on the same subject, she expressed her views of the matrimonial estate in a sentence more terse and vigorous than elegant, — that "she knew t' much to put her

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nose into hot swill." Queen Elizabeth might have expressed her mind in a more courtly way, but certainly with no more decision.

The little head and heart in the next room were full of the rudiments of thoughts, desires, feelings, imaginations, and passions which either had never lived in Miss Asphyxia's nature, or had died so long ago that not a trace or memory of them was left. If she had had even the dawnings of certain traits and properties, she might have doubted of her ability to bring up a child; but she had not.

Yet Miss Asphyxia's faults in this respect were not so widely different from the practice of the hard, rustic inhabitants of Needmore as to have prevented her getting employment as a district-school teacher for several terms, when she was about twenty years of age. She was held to be a "smart," economical teacher, inasmuch as she was able to hold the winter term, and thrash the very biggest boys, and, while she did the duty of a man, received only the wages of a woman, — a recommendation in female qualification which has not ceased to be available in our modern days. Gradually, by incredible industries, by a faculty of pinching, saving, and accumulating hard to conceive of, Miss Asphyxia had laid up money till she had actually come to be the possessor of a small but neat house, and a farm and dairy in excellent condition; and she regarded herself, therefore, and was regarded by others, as a model for imitation. Did she have the least doubt that she was eminently fitted to bring up a girl? I trow not.

Miss Asphyxia, in her early childhood, had been taken to raise in the same manner that she had taken this child. She had been trained to early rising, and constant, hard, unintermitted work, without thought of respite or amusement. During certain seasons of the year she had been sent to the district school, where, always energetic in what-

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ever she took in hand, she always stood at the head of the school in the few arts of scholarship in those days taught. She could write a good, round hand; she could cipher with quickness and adroitness; she had learned by heart all the rules of Murray's Grammar, notwithstanding the fact that, from the habits of early childhood, she habitually set at naught every one of them in her daily conversation, — always strengthening all her denials with those good, hearty double negatives which help out French and Italian sentences, and are unjustly denied to the purists in genteel English. How much of the droll quaintness of Yankee dialect comes from the stumbling of human nature into these racy mistakes will never be known.

Perhaps my readers may have turned over a great, flat stone some time in their rural rambles, and found under it little clovers and tufts of grass pressed to earth, flat, white, and bloodless, but still growing, stretching, creeping towards the edges, where their plant instinct tells them there is light and deliverance. The kind of life that the little Tina led, under the care of Miss Asphyxia, resembled that of these poor clovers. It was all shut down and repressed, but growing still. She was roused at the first glimmer of early dawn, dressing herself in the dark, and, coming out, set the table for breakfast. From that time through the day, one task followed another in immediate succession, with the sense of the ever-driving Miss Asphyxia behind her.

Once, in the course of her labors, she let fall a saucer, while Miss Asphyxia, by good fortune, was out of the room. To tell of her mischance, and expose herself to the awful consequences of her anger, was more than her childish courage was equal to; and, with a quick adroitness, she slipped the broken fragments in a crevice between the kitchen doorstep and the house, and endeavored to look as if nothing had occurred. Alas! she had not counted on

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Miss Asphyxia's unsleeping vigilance of hearing. She was down stairs in a trice.

"What have you been breaking?"

"Nothing, ma'am," was the trembling response.

"Don't tell me! I heard something fall."

"I think it must have been the tongs," said the little girl, — not over-wise or ingenious in her subterfuge.

"Tongs! likely story," said Miss Asphyxia, keenly running her eye over the cups and saucers.

"One, two, — here 's one of the saucers gone. What have you done with it?"

The child, now desperate with fear, saw no refuge but in persistent denial, till Miss Asphyxia, seizing her, threatened immediate whipping if she did not at once confess.

"I dropped a saucer," at last said the frightened child.

"You did, you little slut?" said Miss Asphyxia, administering a box on her ear. "Where is it? what have you done with the pieces?"

"I dropped them down by the doorstep," said the sobbing culprit.

Miss Asphyxia soon fished them up, and held them up in awful judgment. "You 've been telling me a lie, — a naughty, wicked lie," she said. "I 'll soon cure you of lying. I 'll scour your mouth out for you." And forthwith, taking a rag with some soap and sand, she grasped the child's head under her arm, and rubbed the harsh mixture through her mouth with a vengeful energy. "There, now, see if you 'll tell me another lie," said she, pushing her from her. "Don't you know where liars go to, you naughty, wicked girl? 'All liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone,' — that 's what the Bible says; and you may thank me for keeping you from going there. Now go and get up the potatoes and wash 'em, and don't let me get another lie out of your mouth as long as you live."

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There was a burning sense of shame — a smothered fury of resentment — in the child's breast, and, as she took the basket, she felt as if she would have liked to do some mischief to Miss Asphyxia. "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you," she said to herself when she got into the cellar, and fairly out of hearing. "I hate you, and when I get to be a woman, I 'll pay you for all this."

Miss Asphyxia, however, went on her way, in the testimony of a good conscience. She felt that she had been equal to the emergency, and had met a crisis in the most thorough and effectual manner.

The teachers of district schools in those days often displayed a singular ingenuity in the invention of punishments by which the different vices of childhood should be repressed; and Miss Asphyxia's housewifely confidence in soap and sand as a means of purification had suggested to her this expedient in her school-teaching days. "You can break any child o' lying, right off short," she was wont to say. "Jest scour their mouths out with soap and sand. They never want to try it more'n once or twice, I tell you."

The intervals which the child had for play were, in Miss Asphyxia's calendar, few and far between. Sometimes, when she had some domestic responsibility on her mind which made the watching of the child a burden to her, she would say to her, "You may go and play till I call you," or, "You may play for half an hour; but you must n't go out of the yard."

Then the child, alone, companionless, without playthings, sought to appropriate to herself some little treasures and possessions for the instituting of that fairy world of imagination which belongs to childhood. She sighed for a doll that had once belonged to her in the days when she had a mother, but which Miss Asphyxia had contemptuously tossed aside in making up her bundle.

Left thus to her own resources, the child yet showed

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the unquenchable love of beauty, and the power of creating and gilding an imaginary little world, which is the birthright of childhood. She had her small store of what she had been wont to call pretty things, — a broken teapot handle, a fragment of colored glass, part of a goblet that had once belonged to Miss Asphyxia's treasures, one or two smooth pebbles, and some red berries from a wild rose-bush. These were the darlings, the dear delights of her heart, — hoarded in secret places, gazed on by stealth, taken out and arranged and re-arranged, during the brief half-hours, or hours, when Miss Asphyxia allowed her to play. To these treasures the kindly Sol added another; for one day, when Miss Asphyxia was not looking, he drew from his vest-pocket a couple of milkweed pods, and said, "Them 's putty, — mebbe ye 'd like 'em; hide 'em up, though, or she 'll sweep 'em into the fire."

No gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls ever made bright eyes open wider than did the exploring the contents of these pods. It was silk and silver, fairy-spun glass, — something so bright and soft that it really seemed dear to her; and she took the shining silk fringes out and caressed them against her cheek, and wrapped them in a little bit of paper, and put them in her bosom. They felt so soft and downy, — they were so shining and bright, — and they were her own, — Sol had given them to her. She meditated upon them as possessions of mysterious beauty and unknown value. Unfortunately, one day Miss Asphyxia discovered her gazing upon this treasure by stealth during her working hours.

"What have you got there?" she said. "Bring it to me."

The child reluctantly placed her treasure in the great bony claw.

"Why, that 's milkweed silk," said Miss Asphyxia. "'T ain't good for nothin'. What you doing with that?"

"I like it because it 's pretty."

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"Fiddlestick!" said Miss Asphyxia, giving it a contemptuous toss. "I can't have you making litter with such stuff round the house. Throw it in the fire."

To do Miss Asphyxia justice, she would never have issued this order if she had had the remotest conception how dear this apparent trash was to the hopeless little heart.

The child hesitated, and held her treasure firmly. Her breast heaved, and there was a desperate glare in her soft hazel eyes.

"Throw it in the fire," said Miss Asphyxia, stamping her foot, as she thought she saw risings of insubordination.

The child threw it in, and saw her dear, beautiful treasure slowly consumed, with a swelling and indignant heart. She was now sure that Miss Asphyxia hated her, and only sought occasion to torment her.

Miss Asphyxia did not hate the child, nor did she love her. She regarded her exactly as she did her broom and her rolling-pin and her spinning-wheel, — as an implement or instrument which she was to fashion to her uses. She had a general idea, too, of certain duties to her as a human being, which she expressed by the phrase, "doing right by her," — that is, to feed and clothe and teach her. In fact, Miss Asphyxia believed fully in the golden rule of doing as she would be done by; but if a lioness should do to a young lamb exactly as she would be done by, it might be all the worse for the lamb.

The little mind and heart were awakened to a perfect burning conflict of fear, shame, anger, and a desire for revenge, which now overflowed with strange, bitter waters that hitherto ignorantly happy valley of child-life. She had never had any sense of moral or religious obligation, any more than a butterfly or a canary-bird. She had, it is true, said her little prayers every night; but, as she said to herself, she had always said them to mother or Harry,

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and now there was nobody to say them to. Every night she thought of this when she lay down in her joyless, lonesome bed; but the kindly fatigue which hard work brings soon weighed down her eyes, and she slept soundly all night, and found herself hungry at breakfast-time the next morning.

On Sunday Miss Asphyxia rested from her labors, — a strange rest for a soul that had nothing to do in the spiritual world. Miss Asphyxia was past middle life, and, as she said, had never experienced religion, — a point which she regarded with some bitterness, since, as she was wont to say, she had always been as honest in her dealings and kept Sunday as strict as most church-members. Still, she would do her best at giving religious instruction to the child; and accordingly the first Sunday she was dressed in her best frock, and set up in a chair to be kept still while the wagon was getting ready to "go to meetin'," and Miss Asphyxia tried to put into her head the catechism made by that dear, friendly old lover of children, Dr. Watts.

But somehow the first question benignly as it is worded, had a grim and threatening sound as it came from the jaws of Miss Asphyxia, somewhat thus: "Stop playing with your frock, and look right at me, now. 'Can you tell me, dear child, who made you?'"

Now the little one had often heard this point explained, but she felt small disposition to give up her knowledge at this demand; so she only looked at Miss Asphyxia in sulky silence.

"Say, now, after me," said Miss Asphyxia, "'The great God that made heaven and earth.'"

The child repeated the words, in that mumbling, sulky manner which children use when they are saying what does not please them.

"Tina Percival," said Miss Asphyxia, in warlike tones, "do you speak out plain, or I 'll box yer ears."

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Thus warned, the child uttered her confession of faith audibly enough.

Miss Asphyxia was peculiarly harsh and emphatic on the answer which described the omnipresence of the Supreme Being, and her harsh voice, croaking, "If I tell a lie, He sees me, — if I speak an idle or wicked word, He hears me," seemed to the child to have a ghastly triumph in it to confirm the idea that Miss Asphyxia's awful tyranny was thoroughly backed up by that of a Being far more mighty, and from whom there was no possible escape. Miss Asphyxia enforced this truth with a coarse and homely eloquence, that there was no getting away from God, — that He could see in the night just as plain as in the daytime, — see her in the yard, see her in the barn, see her under the bed, see her down cellar; and that whenever she did anything wrong, He would write it down in a dreadful book, and on the Day of Judgment she would have it all brought out upon her, — all which the child heard with a stony, sullen despair. Miss Asphyxia illustrated what became of naughty children by such legends as the story of the two she-bears which came out of a wood and tare forty-and-two children who mocked at old Elisha, till the rebellious auditor quaked in her little shoes, and wondered if the bears would get Harry, and if Harry, after all, would not find some way to get round the bears and come to her help.

At meeting she at last saw Harry, seated, however, in a distant part of the house; but her heart was ready to jump out of her breast to go to him; and when the services were over she contrived to elude Miss Asphyxia, and, passing through the throng, seized his hand just as he was going out, and whispered, "O Harry, Harry, I do want to see you so much! Why don't you come to see me?"

"They would n't let me, Tina," said Harry, drawing his sister into a little recess made between the church and the

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horse-block, — an old-fashioned structure that used to exist for the accommodation of those who came to church on horseback. "They won't let me come. I wanted to come, — I wanted to see you so much!"

"O Harry, I don't like her, — she is cross to me. Do take me away, — do, Harry! Let 's run away together."

"Where could we go, Tina?"

"Oh, somewhere, — no matter where. I hate her; I won't stay with her. Say, Harry, I sleep in a little room by the kitchen; come to my window some night and take me away."

"Well, perhaps I will."

"Here you are, you little minx," said Miss Asphyxia. "What you up to now? Come, the waggin 's waiting," — and, with a look of severe suspicion directed to Harry, she seized the child and conveyed her to the wagon, and was soon driving off with all speed homeward.

That evening the boy pondered long and soberly. He had worked well and steadily during the week, and felt no disposition to complain of his lot on that account, being, as we have said, of a faithful and patient nature, and accepting what the friendly hired men told him, — that work was good for little boys, that it would make him grow strong, and that by and by he would be grown up and able to choose his own work and master. But this separation from his little sister, and her evident unhappiness, distressed him; he felt that she belonged to him, and that he must care for her, and so, when he came home, he again followed Goody Smith to the retirement of her milk-room.

The poor woman had found a perfect summer of delight in her old age in having around her the gentle-mannered, sweet-spoken, good boy, who had thus marvelously fallen to her lot; and boundless was the loving-kindness with which she treated him. Sweet-cakes were slipped into his

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hands at all odd intervals, choice morsels set away for his consumption in secret places of the buttery, and many an adroit lie told to Old Crab to secure for him extra indulgences, or prevent the imposition of extra tasks; and many a little lie did she recommend to him, at which the boy's honest nature and Christian education inclined him greatly to wonder.

That a grown-up, good old woman should tell lies, and advise little boys to tell them, was one of those facts of human experience which he turned over in his mind with wonder, — thinking it over with that quiet questioning which children practice who have nobody of whom they dare make many inquiries. But to-day he was determined to have something done about Tina, and so he began, "Please, won't you ask him to let me go and see Tina to-night? It 's Sunday, and there is n't any work to do."

"Lordy massy, child, he 's crabbeder Sundays than any other day, he has so much time to graowl round. He drinks more cider; and Sunday night it 's always as much as a body's life 's worth to go near him. I don't want you to get him sot agin ye. He got sot agin Obed; and no critter knows why, except mebbe 'cause he was some comfort to me. And ye oughter seen how he used that 'ere boy. Why, I 've stood here in the milk-room and heerd that 'ere boy's screeches clear from the stun pastur'. Finally the men, they said they could n't stan' it, nor they would n't."

"Who was Obed?" said Harry, fearfully.

"Lordy massy! wal, I forgot ye did n't know Obed. He was the baby, ye see. He was born the eighteenth of April, just about nine o'clock in the evening, and Aunt Jerusha Periwinkle and Granny Watkins, they said they had n't seen no sich child in all their nussing. Held up his head jest as lively, and sucked his thumb, he did, — jest the patientest, best baby ye ever did see, — and growed

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beautiful. And he was gettin' to be a real beautiful young man when he went off."

"Went off?" said Harry.

"Yes, he went off to sea, jest for nothin' but 'cause his father aggravated him so."

"What *was* the matter? what *did* he do it for?"

"Wal, Obed, he was allers round helpin' me, — he 'd turn the cheeses for me, and draw the water, and was always on hand when I wanted a turn. And he took up agin him, and said we was both lazy, and that I kept him round waitin' on me; and he was allers a-throwin' it up at me that I thought more of Obed than I did of him; and one day flesh and blood could n't stan' it no longer. I got clear beat out, and says I, 'Well, father, why should n't I? Obed 's allers a-tryin' to help me and make my work easy to me, and thinkin' what he can do for me; and he 's the greatest comfort of my life, and it ain't no sin if I do think more on him than I do of other folks.' Wal, that very day he went and picked a quarrel with him, and told him he was going to give him a stand-up thrashing. And Obed, says he, 'No, father, that you sha'n't. I 'm sixteen year old, and I 've made up my mind you sha'n't thrash me no more.' And with that he says to him, 'Get along out of my house, you lazy dog,' says he; 'you 've been eatin' of my bread too long,' says he. 'Well father, I will,' says Obed. And he walks up to me and kisses me, and says he, 'Never mind, mother, I 'm going to come home one of these days and bring money enough to take care of you in your old age; and you shall have a house of your own, and sha'n't have to work; and you shall sit in your satin gown and drink your tea with white sugar every day, and you sha'n't be no man's slave. You see if I don't.' With that he turned and was off, and I hain't never seen him since."

"How long 's he been gone?"

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"Wal, it 's four years come next April. I 've hed one or two letters from him, and he 's ris' to be mate. And he sent me his wages, — biggest part on 'em, — but he hed to git 'em to me round by sendin' on 'em to Ebal Parker; else *he* 'd 'a' took 'em, ye see. I could n't have nothin' decent to wear to meetin', nor my little caddy o' green tea, if it had n't been for Obed. He won't read Obed's letters, nor hear a word about him, and keeps a-castin' it up at me that I think so much of Obed that I don't love him none."

"I should n't think you would," said the boy innocently.

"Wal, folks seems to think that you must love 'em through thick and thin, and I try ter. I 've allers kep' his clothes mended, and his stockings darned up, and two or three good pair ahead, and done for him jest the best I know how; but as to lovin' folks when they 's so kind o' as he is, I don't reelly know how ter. Expect, ef he was to be killed, I should feel putty bad, too, — kind o' used to havin' on him round."

This conversation was interrupted by the voice of Crab, in the following pleasing style of remark: "What the devil be you a-doin' with that boy, — keepin' him from his work there? It 's time to be to the barn seein' to the critters. Here, you young scamp, go out and cut some feed for the old mare. Suppose I keep you round jest to eat up the victuals and be round under folks' feet?"

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CHAPTER XI

THE CRISIS

MATTERS between Miss Asphyxia and her little subject began to show evident signs of approaching some crisis, for which that valiant virgin was preparing herself with mind resolved. It was one of her educational tactics that children, at greater or less intervals, would require what she was wont to speak of as good whippings, as a sort of constitutional stimulus to start them in the ways of well-doing. As a school-teacher, she was often fond of rehearsing her experiences, — how she had her eye on Jim or Bob through weeks of growing carelessness or obstinacy or rebellion, suffering the measure of iniquity gradually to become full, until, in an awful hour, she pounced down on the culprit in the very blossom of his sin, and gave him such a lesson as he would remember, as she would assure him, the longest day he had to live.

The burning of rebellious thoughts in the little breast, of internal hatred and opposition, could not long go on without slight whiffs of external smoke, such as mark the course of subterranean fire. As the child grew more accustomed to Miss Asphyxia, while her hatred of her increased, somewhat of that native hardihood which had characterized her happier days returned; and she began to use all the subtlety and secretiveness which belonged to her feminine nature in contriving how *not* to do the will of her tyrant, and yet not to seem designedly to oppose. It really gave the child a new impulse in living to devise little plans for annoying Miss Asphyxia without being herself detected.

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In all her daily toils she made nice calculations how slow she could possibly be, how blundering and awkward, without really bringing on herself a punishment; and when an acute and capable child turns all its faculties in such a direction, the results may be very considerable.

Miss Asphyxia found many things going wrong in her establishment in most unaccountable ways. One morning her sensibilities were almost paralyzed, on opening her milk-room door, to find there, with creamy whiskers, the venerable Tom, her own model cat, — a beast who had grown up in the very sanctities of household decorum, and whom she was sure she had herself shut out of the house, with her usual punctuality, at nine o'clock the evening before. She could not dream that he had been enticed through Tina's window, caressed on her bed, and finally sped stealthily on his mission of revenge, while the child returned to her pillow to gloat over her success.

Miss Asphyxia also, in more than one instance, in her rapid gyrations, knocked down and destroyed a valuable bit of pottery or earthen-ware, that somehow had contrived to be stationed exactly in the wind of her elbow or her hand. It was the more vexatious because she broke them herself. And the child assumed stupid innocence: "How could she know Miss Sphyxy was coming that way?" or, "She did n't see her." True, she caught many a hasty cuff and sharp rebuke; but, with true Indian spirit, she did not mind singeing her own fingers if she only tortured her enemy.

It would be an endless task to describe the many vexations that can be made to arise in the course of household experience when there is a shrewd little elf watching with sharpened faculties for every opportunity to inflict an annoyance or do a mischief. In childhood the passions move with a simplicity of action unknown to any other period of life, and a child's hatred and a child's revenge have an intensity of bitterness entirely unalloyed by moral considera-

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tions; and when a child is without an object of affection, and feels itself unloved, its whole vigor of being goes into the channels of hate.

Religious instruction, as imparted by Miss Asphyxia, had small influence in restraining the immediate force of passion. That "the law worketh wrath" is a maxim as old as the times of the Apostles. The image of a dreadful Judge — a great God with ever-watchful eyes, that Miss Asphyxia told her about — roused that combative element in the child's heart which says in the heart of the fool, "There is no God." "After all," thought the little skeptic, "how does she know? She never saw him." Perhaps, after all, then, it might be only a fabrication of her tyrant to frighten her into submission. There was a dear Father that mamma used to tell her about; and perhaps he was the one, after all. As for the bear story, she had a private conversation with Sol, and was relieved by his confident assurance that there "had n't been no bears seen round in them parts these ten year;" so that she was safe in that regard, even if she should call Miss Asphyxia a bald-head, which she perfectly longed to do, just to see what would come of it.

In like manner, though the story of Ananias and Sapphira, struck down dead for lying, had been told her in forcible and threatening tones, yet still the little sinner thought within herself that such things must have ceased in our times, as she had told more than one clever lie which neither Miss Asphyxia nor any one else had found out.

In fact, the child considered herself and Miss Asphyxia as in a state of warfare which suspends all moral rules. In the stories of little girls who were taken captives by goblins or giants or witches, she remembered many accounts of sagacious deceptions which they had practiced on their captors. Her very blood tingled when she thought of the

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success of some of them, — how Hensel and Grettel had heated an oven red-hot, and persuaded the old witch to get into it by some cock-and-bull story of what she would find there; and how, the minute she got in, they shut up the oven door, and burnt her all up! Miss Asphyxia thought the child a vexatious, careless, troublesome little baggage, it is true; but if she could have looked into her heart and seen her imaginings, she would probably have thought her a little fiend.

At last, one day, the smothered fire broke out. The child had had a half-hour of holiday, and had made herself happy in it by furbishing up her little bedroom. She had picked a peony, a yellow lily, and one or two blue irises, from the spot of flowers in the garden, and put them in a tin dipper on the table in her room, and ranged around them her broken bits of china, her red berries and fragments of glass, in various zigzags. The spirit of adornment thus roused within her, she remembered having seen her brother make pretty garlands of oak-leaves; and, running out to an oak hard by, she stripped off an apronful of the leaves, and, sitting down in the kitchen door, began her attempts to plait them into garlands. She grew good-natured and happy as she wrought, and was beginning to find herself in charity even with Miss Asphyxia, when down came that individual, broom in hand, looking vengeful as those old Greek Furies who used to haunt houses, testifying their wrath by violent sweeping.

"What under the canopy you up to now, making such a litter on my kitchen floor?" she said. "Can't I leave you a minute 'thout your gettin' into some mischief, I want to know? Pick 'em up, every leaf of 'em, and carry 'em and throw 'em over the fence; and don't you never let me find you bringing no such rubbish into my kitchen agin!"

In this unlucky moment she turned, and, looking into

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the little bedroom, whose door stood open, saw the arrangements there. "What!" she said; "you been getting down the tin cup to put your messes into? Take 'em all out!" she said, seizing the flowers with a grasp that crumpled them, and throwing them into the child's apron. "Take 'em away, every one of 'em! You 'd get everything out of place, from one end of the house to the other, if I did n't watch you!" And forthwith she swept off the child's treasures into her dust-pan.

In a moment all the smothered wrath of weeks blazed up in the little soul. She looked as if a fire had been kindled in her which reddened her cheeks and burned in her eyes; and, rushing blindly at Miss Asphyxia, she cried, "You are a wicked woman, a hateful old witch, and I hate you!"

"Hity-tity! I thought I should have to give you a lesson before long, and so I shall," said Miss Asphyxia, seizing her with stern determination. "You 've needed a good sound whipping for a long time, miss, and you are going to get it now. I 'll whip you so that you 'll remember it, I 'll promise you."

And Miss Asphyxia kept her word, though the child, in the fury of despair, fought her with tooth and nail, and proved herself quite a dangerous little animal; but at length strength got the better in the fray, and, sobbing, though unsubdued, the little culprit was put to bed without her supper.

In those days the literal use of the rod in the education of children was considered as a direct Bible teaching. The wisest, the most loving parent felt bound to it in many cases, even though every stroke cut into his own heart. The laws of New England allowed masters to correct their apprentices, and teachers their pupils, — and even the public whipping-post was an institution of New England towns. It is not to be supposed, therefore, that Miss Asphyxia

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regarded herself otherwise than as thoroughly performing a most necessary duty. She was as ignorant of the blind agony of mingled shame, wrath, sense of degradation, and burning for revenge, which had been excited by her measures, as the icy east wind of Boston flats is of the stinging and shivering it causes in its course. Is it the wind's fault if your nose is frozen? There is not much danger in these days that such measures will be the fashionable ones in the bringing up of children. But there is a class of coldly-conscientious, severe persons, who still, as a matter of duty and conscience justify measures like these in education. *They*, at all events, are the ones who ought to be forbidden to use them, and whose use of them with children too often proves a soul-murder, — a dispensation of wrath and death. Such a person is commonly both obtuse in sensibility and unimaginative in temperament; but if his imagination could once be thoroughly enlightened to see the fiend-like passions, the terrific convulsions, which are roused in a child's soul by the irritation and degradation of such correction, he would shrink back appalled. With sensitive children left in the hands of stolid and unsympathizing force, such convulsions and mental agonies often are the beginning of a sort of slow moral insanity which gradually destroys all that is good in the soul. Such was the danger now hanging over the hapless little one whom a dying mother had left to God. Is there no stirring among the angel wings on her behalf?

As the child lay sobbing in a little convulsed heap in her bed, a hard, horny hand put back the curtain of the window, and the child felt something thrown on the bed. It was Sol, who, on coming in to his supper, had heard from Miss Asphyxia the whole story, and who, as a matter of course, sympathized entirely with the child. He had contrived to slip a doughnut into his pocket, when his hostess was looking the other way. When the child rose up

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in the bed and showed her swelled and tear-stained face, Sol whispered: "There 's a doughnut I saved for ye. Darn her pictur'! Don't dare say a word, ye know. She 'll hear me."

"O Sol, can't you get Harry to come here and see me?" said the child, in an earnest whisper.

"Yes, I 'll get him, if I have to go to thunder for 't," said Sol. "You jest lie down now, there 's a good girl, and I 'll work it, — ye see if I don't. To-morrow I 'll make her go off to the store, and I 'll get him down here, you see if I don't. It 's a tarnal shame; that 'ere critter ain't got no more bowels than a file."

The child, however, was comforted, and actually went to sleep hugging the doughnut. She felt as if she loved Sol, and said so to the doughnut many times, — although he had great horny fists, and eyes like oxen. With these, he had a heart in his bosom, and the child loved him.

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CHAPTER XII

THE LION'S MOUTH SHUT

"Now, where a plague is that boy?" said Old Crab, suddenly bearing down, as evil-disposed people are always apt to do, in a most unforeseen moment.

The fact was that there had been a silent conspiracy among Sol and Goody Smith and the hired men of Old Crab, to bring about a meeting between the children. Miss Asphyxia had been got to the country store and kept busy with various bargains which Sol had suggested, and Old Crab had been induced to go to mill, and then the boy had been sent by Goody Smith on an errand to Miss Asphyxia's house. Of course he was not to find her at home, and was to stay and see his sister, and be sure and be back again by four o'clock.

"Where a plague is that lazy shote of a boy?" he repeated.

"What, Harry?"

"Yes, Harry. Who do you suppose I mean? Harry, — where is he?"

"Oh, I sent him up to Sphyxy's."

"*You* sent him?" said Old Crab, with that kind of tone which sounds so much like a blow that one dodges one's head involuntarily. "*You* sent him? What business *you* got interfering in the work!"

"Lordy massy, father, I jest wanted Sphyxy's cards and some o' that 'ere fillin' she promised to give me. He won't be gone long."

Old Crab stood at this disadvantage in his fits of ill-tem-

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per with his wife, that there was no form of evil language or abuse that he had not tried so many times on her that it was quite a matter of course for her to hear it. He had used up the English language, — made it, in fact, absolutely of no effect, — while his fund of ill-temper was, after all, but half expressed.

"You 've begun with that 'ere boy just as you allers did with all your own, gettin' 'em to be a waitin' round on you, — jest 'cause you 're a lazy good-for-nothin'. We 're so rich, I wonder you don't hire a waiter for nothin' but to stan' behind your chair. I 'll teach him who his master is when he comes back."

"Now, father, 't ain't no fault o' his 'n. *I* sent him."

"And *I* sot him to work in the fields, and I 'd like to know if he 's goin' to leave what I set him to do, and go round after your errands. Here 't is gettin' to be 'most five o'clock, and the critters want fodderin', and that 'ere boy a-dancing 'tendance on you. But he ain't a-doin' that. He 's jest off a-berryin' or suthin' with that trollopin' sister o' his'n, — jes' what you bring on us, takin' in trampers. That 'ere gal, she pesters Sphyxy half to death."

"Sphyxy 's pretty capable of takin' care of herself," said Goody Smith, still keeping busy with her knitting, but looking uneasily up the road, where the form of the boy might be expected to appear.

The outbreak that she had long feared of her husband's evil nature was at hand. She knew it by as many signs as one foretells the approach of hurricanes or rain-storms. She knew it by the evil gleam in his small, gray eyes, — by the impatient pacing backward and forward in the veranda, like a caged wild animal. It made little matter to him what the occasion was: he had such a superfluity of evil temper to vent, that one thing for his purpose was about as good as another.

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It grew later and later, and Old Crab went to the barn to attend to his cattle, and the poor little old woman knitted uneasily.

"What could 'a' kep' him?" she thought. "He can't 'a' run off." There was a sudden gleam of mingled pleasure and pain in the old woman's heart as this idea darted through her mind. "I should n't wonder if he would, but I kind o' hate to part with him."

At last she sees him coming along the road, and runs to meet him. "How could you be so late? He 's dreffal mad with ye."

"I did n't know how late it was. Besides, all I could do, Tina would follow me, and I had to turn back and carry her home. Tina has bad times there. That woman is n't kind to her."

"No, dear, she ain't noways kind," said the old woman; "it ain't Sphyxy's way to be kind; but she 'll do middlin' well by her, — anyway, she won't let nobody hurt her but herself. It 's a hard world to live in; we have to take it as 't comes."

"Well, anyway," said the boy, "they *must* let us go to see each other. It is n't right to keep us apart."

"No, 't ain't, dear; but lordy massy, what can ye do?"

There was a great steady tear in the boy's large, blue eyes as he stopped at the porch, and he gave a sort of dreary shiver.

"Halleoah you there! you lazy little cuss," said Old Crab, coming from the barn, "where you been idling all the afternoon?"

"I 've been seeing my sister," said the boy, steadily.

"Thought so. Where 's them cards and the fillin' you was sent for?"

"There was n't anybody at home to get them."

"And why did n't you come right back, you little varmint?"

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"Because I wanted to see Tina. She 's my sister; and my mother told me to take care of her; and it 's wicked to keep us apart so."

"Don't you give me none of yer saace," said Old Crab, seizing the boy by one ear, to which he gave a vicious wrench.

"Let me alone," said the boy, flushing up with the sudden irritation of pain and the bitter sense of injustice.

"Let you alone? I guess I won't; talking saace to me that 'ere way. Guess I 'll show you who 's master. It 's time you was walked off down to the barn, sir, and find out who 's your master," he said, as he seized the boy by the collar and drew him off.

"O Lord!" said the woman, running out and stretching her hands instinctively after them. "Father, do let the boy alone."

She could not help this cry any more than a bird can help a shriek when she sees the hawk pouncing down on her nest, though she knew perfectly well that she might as well have shouted a petition in the angry face of the northeast wind.

"Take off your jacket," said Old Crab, as soon as he had helped himself to a long cart-whip which stood there.

The boy belonged to that class of amiable, good-natured children who are not easily irritated or often provoked, but who, when moved by a great injustice or cruelty, are thrown into convulsions of passion. The smallest and most insignificant animal, in moments of utter despair, when every fibre of its being is made vital with the energy of desperate resistance, often has a force which will make the strongest and boldest stand at bay. The boy retreated a pace or two, braced his back against the manger, while his whole form trembled and appeared to dilate, and it seemed as if blue streams of light glared from his eyes like sparks struck from burning steel.

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"Strike me if you dare, you wicked, dreadful man!" he shouted. "Don't you know that God sees you? God is my Father, and my mother is gone to God; and if you hurt me He 'll punish you. You know I have n't done anything wrong, and God knows it. Now strike me if you dare."

The sight of any human being in a singular and abnormal state has something appalling about it; and at this moment the child really appeared to Old Crab like something supernatural. He stood a moment looking at him, and then his eyes suddenly seemed fixed on something above and beyond him, for he gazed with a strange, frightened expression; and at last, pushing with his hands, called out, "Go along; get away, get away! I hain't touched him," and, turning, fled out of the barn.

He did not go to the house again, but to the village tavern, and, entering the bar-room with a sort of distraught air, called for a dram, and passed the evening in a cowering state of quiet in the corner, which was remarked on by many as singular.

The boy came back into the house.

"Massy to us, child," said the old woman, "I thought he 'd half killed ye."

"No, he has n't touched me. God would n't let him," said the boy.

"Well, I declare for 't! he must have sent the angels that shut the lion's mouth when Daniel was in the den," said the woman. "I would n't 'a' had him struck ye, not for ten dollars."

The moon was now rising, large, white, and silvery, yet with a sort of tremulous, rosy flush, as it came up in the girdle of a burning autumn horizon. The boy stood a moment looking at it. His eyes were still dilated with that unnatural light, and his little breast heaving with waves of passion not yet tranquilized.

"Which way did he go?" said the woman.

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"Up the road," said the boy.

"To the tavern," said the woman. "He 's been there before this afternoon. At any rate, then, he 'll let us alone awhile. There comes the men home to supper. Come in; I 've got a turnover I made a purpose for ye."

"No, I must bid you good-by, now," said the boy. "I can't stay here any longer."

"Why, where be ye going?"

"Going to look for a better place, where I can take care of Tina," said the boy.

"Ye ain't a-goin' to leave me?" said the old woman. "Yet I can't want ye to stay. I can't have nothin' nor nobody."

"I 'll come back one of these days," said the boy cheerfully, — "come and see you."

"Stay and get your supper, anyhow," pleaded the old woman. "I hate ter have ye go, drefful bad."

"I don't want any supper," said the child; "but if you 'll give me a little basket of things, — I want 'em for Tina."

The old soul ran to her buttery, and crammed a small splint basket with turnovers, doughnuts, and ample slices of rye bread and butter, and the boy took it and trudged off, just as the hired men were coming home.

"Hulloah, bub!" shouted they, "where ye goin'?"

"Going to seek my fortune," said the boy cheerfully.

"Jest the way they all go," said the old woman.

"Where do you suppose the young un 'll fetch up?" said one of the men to the other.

"No business of mine, — can't fetch up wus than he has ben a-doin'."

"Old Crab a-cuttin' up one of his shines, I s'pose?" said the other, interrogatively.

"Should n't wonder; 'bout time, — ben to the tavern this arternoon, I reckon."

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The boy walked along the rough stony road towards Miss Asphyxia's farm. It was a warm, mellow evening in October. The air had only a pleasant coolness. Everything was tender and bright. A clump of hickory-trees on a rocky eminence before him stood like pillars of glowing gold in the twilight; one by one little stars looked out, winking and twinkling at the lonely child, as it seemed to him, with a friendly, encouraging ray, like his mother's eyes.

That afternoon he had spent trying to comfort his little sister, and put into her soul some of the childlike yet sedate patience with which he embraced his own lot, and the good hopes which he felt of being able some time to provide for her when he grew bigger. But he found nothing but feverish impatience, which all his eloquence could scarcely keep within bounds. He had, however, arranged with her that he should come evenings after she had gone to bed, and talk to her at the window of her bedroom, that she should not be so lonesome nights. The perfectly demoniac violence which Old Crab had shown this night had determined him not to stay with him any longer. He would take his sister, and they would wander off, a long, long way, till they came to better people, and then he would try again to get work, and ask some good woman to be kind to Tina. Such, in substance, was the plan that occurred to the child; and accordingly that night, after little Tina had laid her head on her lonely pillow, she heard a whispered call at her window. The large, bright eyes opened very wide as she sat up in bed and looked towards the window, where Harry's face appeared.

"It 's me, Tina, — I 've come back, — be very still. I 'm going to stay in the barn till everybody's asleep, and then I 'll come and wake you, and you get out of the window and come with me."

"To be sure I will, Harry. Let me come now, and sleep with you in the barn."

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"No, Tina, that would n't do; lie still. They 'd see us. Wait till everybody 's asleep. You just lie down and go to sleep. I 'll get in at your window and waken you when it 's time."

At this moment the door of the child's room was opened; the boy's face was gone in an instant from the window. The child's heart was beating like a trip-hammer; there was a tingling in her ears; but she kept her little eyes tightly shut.

"Oh, here 's that brown towel I gin her to hem," said Miss Asphyxia, peacefully. "She 's done her stent this arternoon. That 'ere whipping did some good."

"You 'll never whip me again," thought the defiant little heart under the bedclothes.

. . . . . .

Old Crab came home that night thoroughly drunk, — a thing that did not very often occur in his experience. He commonly took only just enough to keep himself in a hyena's state of temper, but not enough to dull the edge of his cautious, grasping, money-saving faculties. But to-night he had had an experience that had frightened him, and driven him to deeper excess as a refuge from thought.

When the boy, upon whom he was meaning to wreak his diabolic passions, so suddenly turned upon him in the electric fury of enkindled passion, there was a sort of jar or vibration of the nervous element in the man's nature, that brought about a result not uncommon to men of his habits. As he was looking in a sort of stunned, stupid wonder at the boy, where he stood braced against the manger, he afterwards declared that he saw suddenly in the dark space above it, hovering in the air, the exact figure and form of the dead woman whom they had buried in the graveyard only a few weeks before. "Her eyes was looking right at me, like live coals," he said; "and she had up

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her hand as if she 'd 'a' struck me; and I grew all over cold as a stone."

"What do you suppose 't was?" said his auditor.

"How should I know," said Old Crab. "But there I was; and that very night the young 'un ran off. I would n't have tried to get him back, not for my right hand, I tell you. Tell you what," he added, rolling a quid of tobacco reflectively in his mouth, "*I* don't like dead folks. Ef dead folks 'll let me alone, I 'll let them alone. That 'ere 's fair, ain't it?"

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CHAPTER XIII

THE EMPTY BIRD'S-NEST

THE next morning showed as brilliant a getting up of gold and purple as ever belonged to the toilet of a morning. There was to be seen from Miss Asphyxia's bedroom window a brave sight, if there had been any eyes to enjoy it, — a range of rocky cliffs with little pin-feathers of black pine upon them, and behind them the sky all aflame with bars of massy light, — orange and crimson and burning gold, — and long, bright rays, darting hither and thither, touched now the window of a farmhouse, which seemed to kindle and flash back a morning salutation; now they hit a tall scarlet maple, and now they pierced between clumps of pine, making their black edges flame with gold; and over all, in the brightening sky, stood the morning star, like a great, tremulous tear of light, just ready to fall on a darkened world.

Not a bit of all this saw Miss Asphyxia, though she had looked straight out at it. Her eyes and the eyes of the cow, who, with her horned front, was serenely gazing out of the barn window on the same prospect, were equally unreceptive.

She looked at all this solemn pomp of gold and purple, and the mysterious star, and only said: "Good day for killin' the hog, and I must be up gettin' on the brass kettle. I should like to know why Sol ain't been a-stirrin' an hour ago. I'd really like to know how long folks *would* sleep ef I'd let 'em."

Here an indistinct vision came into Miss Asphyxia's

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mind of what the world would be without her to keep it in order. She called aloud to her prime minister, who slept in the loft above, "Sol! Sol! You awake?"

"Guess I be," said Sol; and a thundering sound of cow-hide boots on the stairs announced that Sol's matutinal toilet was complete.

"We 're late this morning," said Miss Asphyxia, in a tone of virtuous indignation.

"Never knowed the time when we wa'n't late," said Sol, composedly.

"You thump on that 'ere child's door, and tell her to be lively," said Miss Asphyxia.

"Yaas 'm, I will," said Sol, while secretly he was indulging in a long and low chuckle, for Sol had been party to the fact that the nest of that young bird had been for many hours forsaken. He had instructed the boy what road to take, and bade him "walk spry and he would be out of the parish of Needmore afore daybreak. Walk on, then, and follow the road along the river," said Sol, "and it 'll bring you to Oldtown, where our folks be. You can't miss your victuals and drink any day in Oldtown, call at what house you may; and ef you 's to get into Deacon Badger's, why, your fortin 's made. The Deacon he 's a soft-spoken man to everybody, — white folks, niggers, and Indians, — and Ma'am Badger keeps regular poor man's tavern, and won 't turn even a dog away that behaves himself. Ye could n't light on wus than ye have lit on, — for Old Crab 's possessed of a devil, everybody knows; and as for Miss Asphyxia, she 's one of the kind of sperits that goes walkin' through dry places seekin' rest and findin' none. Lordy massy, an old gal like her ain't nobody to bring up a child. It takes a woman that 's got juice in her to do that. Why, that 'ere crittur 's drier 'n a two-year-old mullen-stalk. There ain't no sap ris in her these 'ere thirty years. She means well; but, lordy, you might jest

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as well give young turkey chicks to the old gobbler, and let him stram off in the mowin' grass with 'em, as give a delicate little gal like your sister to her to raise; so you jest go long and keep up your courage, like a brave boy as ye be, and you 'll come to somethin' by daylight;" and Sol added to these remarks a minced pie, with a rye crust of a peculiarly solid texture, adapted to resist any of the incidents of time and travel, which pie had been set out as part of his own last night's supper.

When, therefore, he was exhorted to rap on the little girl's door, he gave sundry noisy, gleeful thumps, — pounding with both fists, and alternating with a rhythmical kick of the cowhide boots, calling out in stentorian tones: "Come, little un, — time you 's up. Miss Sphyxy 's comin' down on ye. Better be lively! Bless me, how the gal sleeps!"

"Don't take the door off the hinges," said Miss Asphyxia, sweeping down stairs. "Let me come; I 'll wake her, I guess!" and with a dipper of cold water in her hand, Miss Asphyxia burst into the little room. "What! — what! — where!" she said, looking under the bed, and over and around, with a dazed expression. "What 's this mean? Do tell if the child 's re'lly for once got up of herself afore I called her. Sol, see if she 's out pickin' up chips!"

Sol opened the door and gazed out with well-affected stolidity at the wood-pile, which, garnished with a goodly show of large chips, was now being touched up and brightened by the first rays of the morning sun.

"Ain't here," he said.

"Ain't here? Why, where can she be then? There ain't nobody swallowed her, I s'pose; and if anybody 's run off with her in the night, I guess they 'd bring her back by daylight."

"She must 'a' run off," said Sol.

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"Run! Where could she 'a' run to?"

"Mebbe she 's gone to her brother's."

"I bet you," said Miss Asphyxia, "it 's that 'ere boy that 's the bottom of it all. You may always know that there 's a boy at the bottom, when there 's any deviltry up. He was here yesterday, — now wa'n't he?"

"Wal, I reckon he was," said Sol. "But, massy, Miss Sphyxy, ef the pigs is to be killed to-day, we can't stan' a-talkin' about what you nor me can't help. Ef the child 's gone, why she 's somewhere in the Lord's world, and it 's likely she 'll keep, — she won't melt away like the manna in the wilderness; and when the pigs is killed, and the pork salted down and got out o' the way, it 'll be time enough to think o' lookin' on her up. She wa'n't no great actual use, — and with kettles o' hot water round, it 's jest as well not to have a child under yer feet. Ef she got scalded, why, there 's your time a-taking care on her, and mebbe a doctor to pay; so it 's jest as well that things be as they be. I call it kind o' providential," said Sol, giving a hoist to his breeches by means of a tug at his suspenders, which gesture was his usual indication that he was girding up the loins of his mind for an immediate piece of work; and, turning forthwith, he brought in a mighty armful of wood, with massive back-log and fore-stick, well grizzled and bearded with the moss that showed that they were but yesterday living children of the forest.

The fire soon leaped and crackled and roared, being well fed with choice split hickory sticks of last year, of which Sol kept ample store; and very soon the big brass kettle was swung over, upon the old iron crane, and the sacrificial water was beginning to simmer briskly, while Miss Asphyxia prepared breakfast, not only for herself and Sol, but for Primus King, a vigorous old negro, famed as a sort of high-priest in all manner of butchering operations for miles around. Primus lived in the debatable land between

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Oldtown and Needmore, and so was at the call of all who needed an extra hand in both parishes.

The appearance of Primus at the gate in his butcher's frock, knife in hand, in fact put an end, in Miss Asphyxia's mind, to all thoughts apart from the present eventful crisis; and she hastened to place upon the table the steaming sausages which, with her usual despatch, had been put down for their morning meal. A mighty pitcher of cider flanked this savory dish, to which Primus rolled delighted eyes at the moment of sitting down. The time had not yet dawned, in those simple, old New England days, when the black skin of the African was held to disqualify him from a seat at the social board with the men whom he joined in daily labor. The strength of the arm, and the skill of the hand, and the willingness of the mind of the workman, in those days, were his passport to equal social rights; and old Primus took rank, in the butchering season, as in fact a sort of leader and commander. His word was law upon all steps and stages of those operations which should transform the plethoric, obese inhabitants of the sty into barrels of pink-hued salt-pork, or savory hams and tenderloins and spareribs, or immense messes of sausage-meat.

Concerning all these matters, Primus was an oracle. His fervid Ethiopian nature glowed with a broad and visible delight, his black face waxed luminous with the oil of gladness, while he dwelt on the savory subject, whereon, sitting at breakfast, he dilated with an unctuous satisfaction that soothed the raven down of darkness in Miss Asphyxia's perturbed mind, till something bearing a distant analogy to a smile played over her rugged features.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE DAY IN FAIRY-LAND

Our little travelers, meanwhile, had had a prosperous journey along the rocky road between Needmore and Old-town, in which Sol had planted their feet. There was a great, round-orbed, sober-eyed October moon in the sky, that made everything as light as day; and the children were alive in every nerve with the keen interest of their escape.

"We are going just as Hensel and Grettel did," said the little girl. "You are Hensel, and I am Grettel, and Miss Asphyxia is the old witch. I wish only we could have burnt her up in her old oven before we came away!"

"Now, Tina, you must n't wish such things really," said the boy, somewhat shocked at such very extreme measures. "You see, what happens in stories would n't do really to happen."

"Oh, but Harry, you don't know how I hate — how I h-ate— Miss Sphyxy! I hate her — most as much as I love you!"

"But, Tina, mother always told us it was wicked to hate anybody. We must love our enemies."

"You don't love Old Crab Smith, do you?"

"No, I don't; but I try not to hate him," said the boy. "I won't think anything about him."

"I can't help thinking," said Tina; "and when I think, I am so angry! I feel such a burning in here!" she said, striking her little breast; "it 's just like fire!"

"Then don't think about her at all," said the boy; "it

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is n't pleasant to feel that way. Think about the whip-poorwills singing in the woods over there, — how plain they say it, don't they? — and the frogs, all singing, with their little, round, yellow eyes looking up out of the water; and the moon looking down on us so pleasantly! she seems just like mother!"

"O Harry, I 'm so glad," said the girl, suddenly throwing herself on his neck and hugging him, — "I 'm so glad we 're together again! Was n't it wicked to keep us apart, — we poor children?"

"Yes, Tina, I am glad," said the boy, with a steady, quiet, inward sort of light in his eyes; "but, baby, we can't stop to say so much, because we must walk fast and get way, way, way off before daylight; and you know Miss Sphyxy always gets up early, — don't she?"

"Oh dear, yes! She always poked me out of bed before it was light, — hateful old thing! Let 's run as fast as we can, and get away!"

And with that she sprang forward, with a brisk and onward race, over the pebbly road, down a long hill, laughing as she went, and catching now at a branch of sweetbrier that overhung the road, and now at the tags of sweetfern, both laden and hoary with heavy autumnal dews, till finally, her little foot tripping over a stone, she fell and grazed her arm sadly. Her brother lifted her up, and wiped the tears from her great, soft eyes with her blue check apron, and talked to her in that grandfatherly way that older children take such delight in when they feel the care of younger ones.

"Now, Tina, darling, you should n't run so wild. We 'd better go pretty fast steadily, than run and fall down. But I 'll kiss the place, as mother used to."

"I don't mind it, Hensel, — I don't mind it," she said, controlling the quivering of her little resolute mouth. "That scratch came for liberty; but this," she said, show-

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ing a long welt on her other arm, — "this was slavery. She struck me there with her great ugly stick. Oh, I never *can* forgive her!"

"Don't let 's talk any more, baby; let 's hurry on. She *never* shall get you again; I 'll fight for you till I die, first!"

"You 'd kill 'em all, would n't you? You would have knocked her down, would n't you?" said Tina, kindling up with that inconsiderate exultation in the powers of an elder brother which belongs to childhood. "I knew you would get me away from here, Harry, — I knew you would."

"But now," said Harry, "you just keep hold of my hand, and let 's run together, and I 'll hold you up. We must run fast, after all, because maybe they will harness up the wagon when daylight comes, and come out to look for us."

"Well, if it 's only Sol comes," said the little girl, "I sha'n't care; for he would only carry us on farther."

"Ay, but you may be sure Miss Asphyxia would come herself."

The suggestion seemed too probable, and the two little pairs of heels seemed winged by it as they flew along, their long shadows dancing before them on the moonlit road, like spiritual conductors. They made such good headway that the hour which we have already recorded, when Miss Asphyxia's slumbers were broken, found the pair of tiny pilgrims five miles away on the road to Oldtown.

"Now, Tina," said the boy, as he stopped to watch the long bars of crimson and gold that seemed to be drawing back and opening in the eastern sky, where the sun was flaring upward an expectant blaze of glory, "only look there! Is n't it so wonderful? It 's worth being out here only to see it. There! there! there! the sun is coming! Look! Only see that bright, red maple, — it seems all on fire! —

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now that yellow chestnut, and that old pine-tree! Oh, see, see those red leaves! They are like the story papa used to tell of the trees that bore rubies and emeralds. Aren't they beautiful?"

"Set me on the fence, so as I can see," said Tina. "O Harry, it's beautiful! And to think that we can see it together!"

Just at this moment they caught the distant sound of wheels.

"Hurry, Tina! Let me lift you over the fence," said the boy; "they are coming!"

How the little hearts beat, as both children jumped down into a thicket of sweet-fern, heavy and wet with morning dew! The lot was one of those confused jungles which one often sees hedging the course of rivers in New England. Groups of pine and hemlock grew here and there, intermixed with low patches of swampy land, which were waving with late wild-flowers and nodding swamp-grasses. The children tore their way through golden-rods, asters, and cat-tails to a little elevated spot where a great flat rock was surrounded by a hedge of white-pine. This was precisely the shelter they wanted: for the pines grew so thickly around it as completely to screen it from sight from the road, while it was open to the warm beams of the morning sun.

"Cuddle down here, Tina," said Harry, in a whispering voice, as if he feared the driver in the rattling farm-wagon might hear them.

"Oh, what a nice little house the trees make here!" said Tina. "We are as snug here and as warm as can be; and only see what a nice white-and-green carpet there is all over the rock!"

The rock, to be sure, was all frothed over with a delicate white foam of moss, which, later in the day, would have crackled and broken in brittle powder under their footsteps,

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but which now, saturated by the heavy night-dews, only bent under them, a soft, elastic carpet.

Their fears were soon allayed when, peeping like scared partridges from their cover, they saw a farm-wagon go rattling by from the opposite direction to that in which Miss Asphyxia lived.

"Oh, it 's nobody for us; it comes the other way," said the boy.

It was, in fact, Primus King, going on his early way to preside over the solemnities of pig-killing.

"Then, Hensel, we are free," said the little girl; "nobody will catch us now. They could no more find us in this lot than they could find a little, little tiny pin in the hay-mow."

"No, indeed, Tina; we are safe now," said the boy.

"Why don't you call me Grettel? We will play be Hensel and Grettel; and who knows what luck will come to us?"

"Well, Grettel then," said the boy obediently. "You sit now, and spread out your frock in the sun to dry, while I get out some breakfast for you. Old Aunty Smith has filled my basket with all sorts of good things."

"And nice old Sol, — he gave us his pie," said Tina. "I love Sol, though he is a funny-looking man. You ought to see Sol's hand, it 's so big! And his feet, — why, one of his shoes would make a good boat for me! But he 's a queer old dear, though, and I love him."

"What shall we eat first?" said the boy, — "the bread and butter, or the cookies, or the doughnuts, or the pie?"

"Let 's try a little of all of them," said young madam.

"You know, Tina," said the boy, in a slow, considerate way, "that we must take care of this, because we don't know when we 'll get any more. There 's got to be a dinner and a supper got out of this at any rate."

"Oh, well, Hensel, you do just as you please with it,

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then; only let 's begin with Sol's pie and some of that nice cheese, for I am so hungry! And then, when we have had our breakfast, I mean to lie down in the sun, and have a nap on this pretty white moss. O Harry, how pretty this moss is! There are bright little red things in it, as bright as mother's scarlet cloak. But, O Harry, look, quick! don't say a word! There 's a squirrel! How bright his little eyes are! Let 's give him some of our breakfast."

Harry broke off a crumb of cake and threw it to the little striped-backed stranger.

"Why, he 's gone like a wink," said the girl. "Come back, little fellow; we sha'n't hurt you."

"Oh, hush, Tina, he 's coming! I see his bright eyes. He 's watching that bit of cake."

"There, he 's got it and off!" said Tina, with a shriek of delight. "See him race up that tree with it!"

"He 's going to take it home to his wife."

"His wife!" said Tina, laughing so hard at Harry's wit that she was obliged to lay down her pie. "Has he got a wife?"

"Why, of course he has," said Harry, with superior wisdom.

"I 'm your wife, ain't I?" said Tina contentedly.

"No. You 're my little sister, and I take care of you," said the boy. "But people can't have their sisters for wives; the Bible says so."

"Well, I can be just like your wife; and I 'll mend your clothes and knit your stockings when I get bigger."

To which practical view of matrimonial duties Harry gave a grave assent.

Not a striped-backed squirrel, or a bobolink, or a catbird, in the whole pasture-lot, had better spirits than our two little travelers. They were free; they were together; the sun was shining and birds were singing; and as for the

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future, it was with them as with the birds. The boy, to be sure, had a share of forethought and care, and deemed himself a grown man acting with most serious responsibility for his light-headed little sister; but even in him this was only a half-awakening from the dreamland of childhood.

When they had finished their breakfast, he bethought him of his morning prayers, and made Tina kneel down beside him while he repeated psalm and hymn and prayer, in which she joined with a very proper degree of attention. When he had finished, she said, "Do you know, Hensel, I have n't said my prayers a single once since I 've been at Miss Sphyxia's?"

"Why, Tina!"

"Well, you see, there was n't anybody to say them to, now mother is gone; and you were not there."

"But you say them to God, Tina."

"Oh, he 's so far off, and I 'm so little, I can't say them to him. I must say them to somebody I can see. Harry, where is mother gone?"

"She is gone to heaven, Tina."

"Where is heaven?"

"It 's up in the sky, Tina," said the boy, looking up into the deep, cloudless blue of an October sky, which, to say the truth, is about as celestial a thing as a mortal child can look into; and as he looked, his great blue eyes grew large and serious with thoughts of his mother's last wonderful words.

"If it 's up in the sky, why did they dig down into the ground, and put her in that hole?" said the little skeptic.

"It is her soul that went up. Her body is planted like a beautiful flower. She will come up by and by; and we shall see her again, if we are good children."

Tina lay back on the white moss, with only a fringy bough of white-pine between her and the deep, eternal blue, where the thinnest films of white clouds were slowly

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sailing to and fro. Her spiritual musings grew, to say the truth, rather confused. She was now very tired with her night tramp; and the long fringes fell over her great, dark eyes, as a flower shuts itself, and she was soon asleep.

The boy sat watching her awhile, feeling soothed by the calm, soft sunshine, and listening to the thousand sweet lullaby-notes which Nature is humming to herself, while about her great world-housework, in a calm October morning. The locusts and katydids grated a drowsy, continuous note to each other from every tree and bush; and from a neighboring thicket a lively-minded cat-bird was giving original variations and imitations of all sorts of bird voices and warblings; while from behind the tangled thicket which fringed its banks came the prattle of a hidden river, whose bright brown waters were gossiping, in a pleasant, constant chatter, with the many-colored stones on the bottom; and when the light breezes wandered hither and thither, as your idle breezes always will be doing, they made little tides and swishes of sound among the pine-trees, like the rising and falling of sunny waters on the seashore.

Altogether, it was not long before Harry's upright watch over his sister subsided into a droop upon one elbow, and finally the little curly head went suddenly down on to his sister's shoulder; and then they were fast asleep, — as nice a little pair of babes in the wood as ever the robins could cover up. They did not awake till it was almost noon. The sun was shining warm and cloudless, and every bit of dew had long been dried; and Tina, in refreshed spirits, proposed that they should explore the wonders of the pasture-lot, — especially that they should find out where the river was whose waters they heard gurgling behind the leafy wall of wild vines.

"We can leave our basket here in our little house, Hensel. See, I set it in here, way, way in among the pine-trees; and that 's my little green closet."

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So the children began picking their way through the thicket guided by the sound of the water.

"O Tina!" said the boy; "look there, over your head!"

The object pointed out was a bough of a wild grape-vine heavily laden with ripe purple grapes.

"Oh, wild grapes!" said Tina. "Harry, do get them!"

Harry soon pulled the bough down within reach, and the children began helping themselves.

"I'm going to take an apronful up to the tree, and put into our closet," said Tina; "and we shall have a nice store there."

"But, Tina, we can't live there on the rock," said the boy, "we must walk on and get to Oldtown some time."

"Oh, well, we have the whole long, long day for it," said the girl, "and we may as well have a good time now; so, when I've put up these grapes, we'll see where the river is."

A little scrambling and tearing through vines soon brought the children down to the banks of a broad, rather shallow river, whose waters were of that lustrous yellow-brown which makes every stone gleam up from the bottom in mellow colors, like the tints through the varnish of an old picture. The banks were a rampart of shrubbery and trees hung with drapery of wild vines, now in the brilliancy of autumnal coloring. It is not wonderful that exclamations of delight and wonder burst from both children. An old hemlock that hung slantwise over the water opposite was garlanded and interwoven, through all its dusky foliage, with wreaths and pendants of the Virginia creeper, now burning in the brilliant carmine and scarlet hues of autumn. Great, soft, powdery clumps of goldenrod projected their heads from the closely interwoven thicket, and leaned lovingly over the stream, while the royal purple of tall asters was displayed in bending plumage at their side. Here and there, a swamp-maple seemed all one crimson

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flame; while greener shrubbery and trees, yet untouched by frosts, rose up around it, as if purposely to give background and relief to so much color. The rippling surface of the waters, as they dashed here and there over the stones, gave back colored flashes from the red, yellow, crimson, purple, and green of the banks; while ever and anon little bright leaves came sailing down the stream, all moist and brilliant, like so many floating gems. The children clapped their hands, and began, with sticks, fishing them towards the shore. "These are our little boats," they said. So they were, — fairy boats, coming from the land of nowhere, and going on to oblivion, shining and fanciful, like the little ones that played with them.

"I declare," said Tina, "I mean to take off my shoes and stockings, and wade out to that little island where those pretty white stones are. You go with me."

"Well, Tina, wait till I can hold you."

And soon both the little pairs of white feet were slipping and spattering among the pebbles at the bottom. On the way Tina made many efforts to entrap the bright rings of sunlight on the bottom, regardless of the logic with which Harry undertook to prove to her that it was nothing but the light, and that she could not catch it; and when they came to the little white gravelly bank, they sat down and looked around them with great content.

"We 're on a desolate island, are n't we, Hensel?" said Tina. "I like desolate islands," she added, looking around her, with the air of one who had had a wide experience of the article. "The banks here are so high, and the bushes so thick, that Miss Asphyxia could not find us if she were to try. We 'll make our home here."

"Well, I think, Tina, darling, that it won't do for us to stay here very long," said Harry. "We must try to get to some place where I can find something to do, and some good, kind woman to take care of you."

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"O Harry, what 's the use of thinking of that, — it's so bright and pleasant, and it 's so long since I 've had you to play with! Do let 's have one good, pleasant day alone among the flowers! See how beautiful everything is!" she added, "and it 's so warm and quiet and still, and all the birds and squirrels and butterflies are having such a good time. I don't want anything better than to play about out in the woods with you."

"But where shall we sleep nights, Tina?"

"Oh, it was so pleasant last night, and the moon shone so bright, I would not be afraid to cuddle down under a bush with you, Harry."

"Ah, Tina! you don't know what may come. The moon don't shine all night, and there may be cold and wind and rain, and then where would we be? Come, darling, let 's go on; we can walk in the fields by the river, and so get down to the place Sol told us about."

So at last the little fanciful body was persuaded to wade back from her desolate island, and to set out once more on her pilgrimage. But even an older head than hers might have been turned by the delights of that glorious October day, and gone off into a vague trance of bliss, in which the only good of life seemed to be in luxurious lounging and dreamy enjoyment of the passing hour. Nature in New England is, for the most part, a sharp, determined matron, of the Miss Asphyxia school. She is shrewd, keen, relentless, energetic. She runs through the seasons a merciless express-train, on which you may jump if you can, at her hours, but which knocks you down remorselessly if you come in her way, and leaves you hopelessly behind if you are late. Only for a few brief weeks in the autumn does this grim, belligerent female condescend to be charming; but when she does set about it, the veriest Circe of enchanted isles could not do it better. Airs more dreamy, more hazy, more full of purple light and lustre, never lay

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over Cyprus or Capri than those which each October overshadow the granite rocks and prickly chestnuts of New England. The trees seem to run no longer sap, but some strange liquid glow; the colors of the flowers flame up, from the cold, pallid delicacy of spring, into royal tints wrought of the very fire of the sun and the hues of evening clouds. The humblest weed, which we trod under our foot unnoticed in summer, changes with the first frost into some colored marvel, and lifts itself up into a study for a painter, — just as the touch of death or adversity often strikes out in a rough nature traits of nobleness and delicacy before wholly undreamed of.

The children traveled onward along the winding course of the river, through a prairie-land of wild-flowers. The whole tribe of asters — white, lilac, pale blue, and royal purple — were rolling in perfect billows of blossoms around them, and the sprays of goldenrod often rose above their heads, as they crackled their way through the many-colored thickets. The children were both endowed with an organization exquisitely susceptible to beauty, and the flowers seemed to intoxicate them with their variety and brilliancy. They kept gathering from right to left without any other object than the possession of a newer and fairer spray, till their little arms were full; and then they would lay them down to select from the mass the choicest, which awhile after would be again thrown by for newer and fairer treasures. Their motion through the bushes often disturbed clouds of yellow butterflies, which had been hanging on the fringes of the tall purple asters, and which rose toying with each other, and fluttering in ethereal dances against the blue sky, looking like whirls and eddies of air-flowers. One of the most brilliant incidents in the many-colored pictures of October days is given by these fluttering caprices of the butterflies. Never in any other part of the season are these airy tribes so many and so brilliant. There are,

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in particular, whole armies of small, bright yellow ones, which seem born for no other purpose than to make effective and brilliant contrasts with those royal-purple tints of asters, and they hang upon them as if drawn to them by some law of affinity in their contrasting colors.

Tina was peculiarly enchanted with the fanciful fellowship of these butterflies. They realized exactly her ideal of existence, and she pointed them out to Harry as proof positive that her own notion of living on sunshine and flowers was not a bad one. She was quite sure that they could sleep out all night if the butterflies could, and seemed not to doubt that they would fancy her as a bedfellow.

Towards sundown, when the children were somewhat weary of wandering, and had consumed most of the provisions in their basket, they came suddenly on a little tent pitched in the field, at the door of which sat an old Indian woman weaving baskets. Two or three red-skinned children, of about the same age as our wanderers, were tumbling and kicking about on the ground, in high frolic, with about as many young puppies, who were scratching, rolling, and biting, with their human companions, in admirable spirits. There was a fire before the door, over which a pot was swung from a frame of crossed sticks, the odor of which steamed up, suggestive of good cheer.

The old Indian woman received the children with a broad, hearty grin, while Harry inquired of her how far it was to Oldtown.

The old squaw gave it as her opinion, in very Indian English, that it was "muchee walkee" for little white boy, and that he had best stay with her that night and go on to-morrow.

"There, Harry," said Tina, "now you see just how it is. This is a nice little house for us to sleep in, and oh! I see such pretty baskets in it."

The old woman drew out a stock of her wares, from

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which she selected a small, gayly-painted one, which she gave to the children; in short, it was very soon arranged that they were to stop to supper and spend the night with her. The little Indians gathered around them and surveyed them with grins of delight; and the puppies, being in that state of ceaseless effervescence of animal spirits which marks the indiscreet era of puppyhood, soon had the whole little circle in a state of uproarious laughter.

By and by, the old woman poured the contents of the pot into a wooden trough, and disclosed a smoking mess of the Indian dish denominated succotash, — to wit, a soup of corn and beans, with a generous allowance of salt pork. Offering a large, clean clam-shell to each of the children, she invited them to help themselves.

Whether it was the exhilarating effect of a whole day spent on foot in the open air, or whether it was owing to the absolute perfection of the cookery, we cannot pretend to say, but certain it is that the children thought they had never tasted anything better; and Tina's spirits became so very airy and effervescent, that she laughed perpetually, — a state which set the young barbarians to laughing for sympathy; and this caused all the puppies to bark at once, which made more fun; so that, on the whole, a jollier supper company could nowhere be found.

After sundown, when the whole party had sufficiently fatigued themselves with play and laughing, the old woman spread a skin inside the tent, where Tina lay down contentedly between Harry and one of the puppies, which she insisted upon having as her own particular bedfellow. Harry kneeled down to his prayers outside the tent, which being observed by the Indian woman, she clasped her hands, and seemed to listen with great devotion; and when he had finished, she said, "Me praying Indian; me much love Jesus."

The words were said with a tender gleam over the rough,

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hard, swarthy features; and the child felt comforted by them as he nestled down to his repose.

"Harry," said Tina, decisively, "let 's we live here. I like to play with the puppies, and the old woman is good to us."

"We 'll see, Tina," said wise little Harry.

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CHAPTER XV

THE OLD MANOR-HOUSE

ALAS! the next morning dawned wet and rainy. The wind flapped the tent-cover, and the rain put out the fire; and, what was worse, a cross, surly Indian man came home, who beat the poor old woman, and scattered the children and puppies, like partridges, into the bushes.

The poor old squaw took it all patiently, and seemed only intent on protecting the children from injuries and inconveniences on which she calculated as part of her daily lot. She beckoned them to her, and pointed across a field. "Go dat way. White folks dere be good to you." And she insisted on giving them the painted basket and some coarse corn bread.

They set off through the fields; but the wind was chilly and piercing, and the bushes and grass were wet, and Tina was in a doleful state. "O Harry, I wish we had a house to live in! Where do you suppose all the butterflies are staying that we saw yesterday? I 'd like to go where they stay."

"Never mind, Tina; by and by we 'll come to a house."

They passed a spot where evidently some Indians had been camping, for there were the remains of a fire; and Harry picked up some dry brush and refuse sticks around, and kindled it up bright for Tina to warm and dry herself. They sat there awhile and fed the fire, till they began to feel quite warm. In one of Harry's excursions for sticks, he came back and reported a house in sight.

Sure enough, concealed from view behind a pine thicket

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was a large, stately mansion, the approach to which was through an avenue of majestic trees. The path to this was all grown over with high grass, and a wilderness of ornamental shrubbery seemed to have twined and matted itself together in a wild labyrinth of utter desertion and neglect. The children made their way up the avenue through dripping grass, and bushes that reached almost to their shoulders, and that drizzled water upon their partially dried garments in a way that made Tina shiver. "I 'm so cold!" she said, pitifully. "The folks must let us come in to dry us."

They at last stood before the front door, in a sort of porch which overshadowed it, and which rested on Corinthian pillars of some architectural pretension. The knocker was a black serpent with its tail in its mouth. Tina shuddered with some vague, inward dread, as Harry, rising on tiptoe, struck several loud blows upon it, and then waited to see who would appear.

The wind now rose, and tossed and swung the branches of the great trees in the avenue with a creaking, groaning sound. The shrubbery had grown around the house in a dense and tangled mass, that produced, in the dismal stormy weather, a sense of oppression and darkness. Huge lilacs had climbed above the chamber windows, and clumps of syringas billowed outward from the house in dense cascades; while roses and various kinds of more tender shrubbery, which had been deprived of light and air by their more hardy neighbors, filled up the space below with bare, dead branches, through which the wind sighed dolefully.

"Harry, do knock again," said Tina, when they had waited some time.

"It 's no use," said the boy; "I don't think anybody lives here."

"Perhaps, if we go round to the back of the house, we shall find somebody," said Tina; "it 's storming worse

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and worse." And the little girl plunged resolutely into the thicket of dead shrubbery, and began tearing her way through.

There was a door on the side of the house, much like that in front; and there were spacious back buildings, which, joining the house, stretched far away in the shrubbery. Harry tried this side door. It was firmly locked. The children then began regularly trying every door that presented itself to their view. At last one, after considerable effort, gave way before their united exertions, and opened to them a shelter from the storm, which was now driving harder and harder. It was a place that had evidently been used for the storing of wood, for there was then quite a pile of fuel systematically arranged against the wall. An ancient axe, perfectly red with rust, was also hanging there.

"Well, we 're in at last," said Tina, "but wet through. What a storm it is!"

"Perhaps we can get to some better place in the house," said Harry; "here is wood, and we might make a fire and dry our clothes, and wait here till the storm is over."

He accordingly pushed against a door at the farther end of the wood-shed, and it opened before him into a large old kitchen. There was the ample fireplace of olden times, extending quite across one side, garnished with a crane having various hooks and other paraphernalia for the convenience of culinary operations.

"There, now," said Harry, "is a fireplace, and here is wood. Now we can dry ourselves. Just you wait here, and I 'll go back and bring a brand from our fire, if the rain has n't put it all out." And Harry turned, and hastily made the best of his way out of the house, to secure his treasure before it should be too late.

Tina now resolved to explore some of the other rooms. She opened a door which seemed to lead into a large dining-

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hall. A heavy dining-table of dark wood stood in the middle of this room, and a large, old-fashioned carved side-board filled up an arched recess. Heavy mahogany chairs with stuffed leathern bottoms stood against the wall, but the brass nails with which they had been finished were green with rust. The windows of this room were so matted over with cobwebs, and so darkened by the dense shrubbery outside, as to give the apartment a most weird and forlorn appearance. One of the panes of the window had been broken, perhaps by the striking of the shrubbery against it; and the rain and snow beating in there had ruined the chair that stood below, for the seat of it was all discolored with mould.

Tina shivered as she looked at this dreary room, and the tapping of her own little heels seemed to her like something ghostly; so she hastened to open another door. This led to a small apartment, which had evidently been a lady's boudoir. The walls were hung with tapestry of a dark green ground, on which flowers and fruits and birds were represented in colors that yet remained brilliant, notwithstanding the dilapidated air of some portions of it. There was a fireplace in this room, and the mantel was choicely carved, of white Italian marble, and upon it were sundry flasks and vases of Venetian glass, of quaint and strange shapes, which the child eyed with awestruck curiosity. By the side of the fireplace was a broad lounge or sofa, with a pile of cushions, covered with a rich but faded brocade, of a pattern evidently made to carry out the same design with the tapestry on the wall.

A harpsichord occupied another side of the room, and upon it were piled music-books and manuscript music yellow with age. There was a sort of Oriental guitar or lute suspended from the wall, of which one of the strings, being broken, vibrated with the air of the door when the child made her way into the room, and continued quivering

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in a way that seemed to her nervous and ghostly. Still she was a resolute and enterprising little body; and though her heart was beating at a terrible rate, she felt a sort of mixture of gratified curiosity and exultation in her discovery.

"I wish Harry would come back," she said to herself. "We might make a fire in this pretty little room, and it would be quite snug, and we could wait here till the folks come home." How glad she was when the sound of his voice and footsteps broke the terrible loneliness! She ran out to him, exclaiming, "O Harry, we won't make a fire in this great, doleful old kitchen. I've found such a nice little room full of pretty things! Let me bring in some wood;" — and, running to the wood-pile, she filled her arms.

"It was all I could do to find a brand with a bit of fire on it," said Harry. "There was only the least spark left, but I put it under my jacket and blew and blew, and now we have quite a bright spot in it," he said, showing with exultation a black brand with a round, fiery eye in it, which had much the appearance of a knowing old goblin winking at the children.

The desolate boudoir was soon a scene of much animation, as the marble hearth was strewn with chips and splinters.

"Let me blow, Harry," said Tina, "while you go and look for some more of this brushwood. I saw a heap in that wood house. I'll tend the fire while you are gone. See," she said triumphantly to him, when he returned, dragging in a heavy pile of brushwood, "we'll soon have such a fire!" — and she stooped down over the hearth, laying the burnt ends of sticks together, and blowing till her cheeks were so aflame with zeal and exertion that she looked like a little live coal herself. "Now for it!" she said, as she broke bit after bit of the brushwood. "See

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now, it 's beginning to burn, — hear it crackle! Now put on more and more."

Very soon, in fact, the brushwood crackled and roared in a wide sheet of flame up the old chimney; and being now reënforced with stout sticks of wood, the fire took a solid and settled and companionable form, — the brightest, most hopeful companion a mortal could ask for in a chill, stormy day in autumn.

"Now, Harry," said Tina, "let 's dry our clothes, and then we will see what we can do in our house."

"But is it really ours?" said thoughtful Harry. "Who knows who it may belong to?"

"Do you think," said Tina, apprehensively, "that any giant lives here that has gone out and will come home again? Father used to tell us a story like that."

"There are n't really giants nowadays, Tina," said Harry; "those are only stories. I don't think that it looks as if anybody had lived here for a great while. Things don't look as if anybody lived here, or was expecting to come back."

"Then we may as well live here as anybody," said Tina, "and I will keep house for you. I will roast some apples for our dinner, — I saw ever so many out here on the tree. Roast apples with our corn bread will be so good! And then we can sleep to-night on this great, wide sofa, — can't we? Here, let me sweep up the chips we have made, and make our little house look nice."

"It must be a long time since any one has lived here," said Harry, looking up at the cobwebbed window, against which the shrubbery was dashing and beating in the fury of the storm, "and there can't be the least harm in our staying here till the storm is over."

"Such a strange, pretty room this is!" said Tina, "and so many strange, pretty things in it! Do you know, Harry, I was almost afraid to be here while you were gone;

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but this bright, warm fire makes such a difference. Fire is company, is n't it?"

When the little one had dried her clothes, she began, with a restless, butterfly sort of motion, to investigate more closely the various objects of the apartment. She opened the harpsichord, and struck a few notes, which sounded rather discordantly, as an instrument which chill and solitude had smitten with a lasting hoarseness.

"Oh, horrid! This is n't pretty," she said. "I wonder who ever played on it? But, O Harry! come and look here! I thought this was another room in here, with a fire in it," she said, as she lifted a curtain which hung over a recess. "Look! it 's only looking-glass in a door. Where does it go to? Let 's see." And with eager curiosity she turned the knob, and the door opened, disclosing only a sort of inner closet, which had been evidently employed for a writing-cabinet, as a writing-table stood there, and book-cases filled with books.

What most attracted the attention of the children was a picture, which was hung exactly opposite the door, so that it met the children face to face. It was the image of a young girl, dressed in white, with long, black, curling hair falling down over her neck and shoulders. The dark eyes had an expression both searching and melancholy; and it was painted in that peculiar manner, which produces such weird effects on the beholder, in which the eyes seem to be fixed upon the spectator, and to follow him on whichever side he stands.

"What a pretty lady! But she looks at us so!" said Tina, covering her eyes. "I almost thought it was a real woman."

"Whichever way we move, she looks after us," said Harry.

"She looks as if she would speak to us," said Tina; "she surely wants to say something."

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"It is something very sad, then," said the boy, studying the picture attentively. "She was not sad as mother was," said he, with a delicate, spiritual instinct reading the impression of the face. "Mother used to look very, very sad, but in a different way, — a better way, I think."

"Of course it is n't in the least like mother," said Tina. "Mother had soft, bright hair, — not black, like this; and her eyes were blue, like yours, Harry."

"I don't mean her hair or her eyes," said Harry; "but when mother was sad, she always used to pray. I don't think this one looks as if she would pray," said the boy, rather under his breath.

There was, in fact, a lurking sparkle of haughty determination in the depths of the mournful eyes, and a firm curve to the lines of the mouth, an arching of the neck, and a proud carriage of the head, that confirmed the boy's strictures, and indicated that, whatever sorrows might have crushed the poor heart that beat beneath that fair form, they were borne in her own strength, with no uplooking for aid.

Tina longed to open the drawers of the cabinet beneath the picture, but Harry held her hand. "Tina, dear, what would mother say?" he said, reprovingly. "This is n't our house. Whoever owns it would n't think it was wrong for us to stay here in such a storm, but we certainly ought not to touch their things."

"But we may go through the house, and see all the rooms," said Tina, who had a genuine feminine passion for rummaging, and whose curiosity was piqued to the extreme point by the discoveries already made. "I shall be afraid to sleep here to-night, unless I know all that is in the house."

So the children went, hand in hand, through the various apartments. The house was one of those stately manors which, before the Revolutionary war, the titled aristocracy

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of England delighted to reproduce on the virgin soil of America. Even to this modern time, some of the old provincial towns in New England preserve one or two of these monuments of the pride and pomp of old colonial days, when America was one of the antechambers of the English throne and aristocracy.

The histories of these old houses, if searched into, present many romantic incidents, in which truth may seem wilder than fiction. In the breaking of the ties between the mother country and America, many of these stately establishments were suddenly broken up, and the property, being subject to governmental claims yet undecided, lay a long time unoccupied; the real claimant being in England, and their possessions going through all the processes of deterioration and decay incident to property in the hands of agents at a distance from the real owners. The moss of legend and tradition grew upon these deserted houses. Life in New England, in those days, had not the thousand stimulants to the love of excitement which are to be found in the throng and rush of modern society, and there was a great deal more of story-telling and romancing in real life than exists now; and the simple villagers by their firesides delighted to plunge into the fathomless abyss of incidents that came from the histories of grand, unknown people across the water, who had established this incidental connection with their neighborhood. They exaggerated the records of the pomp and wealth that had environed them. They had thrilling legends of romantic and often tragic incidents, of which such houses had been the theatres. More than one of them had its well-attested ghosts, which, at all proper hours, had been veritably seen to go through all those aimless ghostly perambulations and performances which, according to village legends, diversify the leisure of the spiritual state.

The house into which the children's wandering fortunes

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had led them was one whose legends and history formed the topic of many an excited hour of my childhood, as crooned over to me by different story-telling gossips; and it had, in its structure and arrangements, the evident impress of days never more to be reproduced in New England. Large and lofty apartments, some of them still hung with tapestry, and some adorned with arches and columns, were closed in from air and light by strong shutters, although a dusky glimmer came through the heart-shaped holes cut in them. Some of these apartments were quite dismantled and bare. In others the furniture was piled together in confusion, as if for the purpose of removal. One or two chambers were still thoroughly furnished, and bore the marks of having been, at some recent period, occupied; for there were mattresses and pillows and piles of bedclothing on the great, stately bedsteads.

"We might sleep in one of these rooms," said Harry.

"Oh, no, no!" said the child, clinging to him; "I should be afraid. That great, dreadful-looking, dark bed! And who knows what might be behind the curtains! Let me sleep in the bright little room, where we can see all around us I should be afraid that lady in the closet would walk about these rooms in the night."

"Perhaps she did once," said Harry. "But come, let us go down. The wind blows and howls so about these lonesome rooms, it makes me afraid."

"How it rumbles down the chimneys!" said Tina; "and now it squeals just as if somebody was hurting it. It 's a terrible storm, is n't it?"

"Yes, it 's well we are in a house at any rate," said Harry; "but let's go down and bring in wood, and I 'll get some apples and pears off the trees out by the back door."

And so the two poor little swallows chittered as they built their small, innocent nest in the deserted house, as ignorant of the great Before and After, as if they had had

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wings and feathers, and round, bright bird-eyes, instead of curly, golden heads. Harry brought in a quantity of fruit in Tina's little checked apron, and, like two squirrels, they stored it under the old brocade sofa.

"Now ever so much wood in the hall here," said Tina, with the providence of a little housewife; "because when the dark night comes we shall be afraid to go into the wood-house."

Harry felt very large and very provident, and quite like a householder, as he brought armful after armful and laid it outside the door, while Tina arranged some apples to roast on the marble hearth. "If we only could get something to eat every day, we might live here always," she said.

And so that evening, when the night shadows came down darkly on the house, though the storm without thundered and beat and groaned amid the branches of the old trees, and rumbled and shook the chimneys of the solitary manor-house, there was one nook that presented as bright and warm a picture as two fair child-faces, with a background of strange antique furniture and surroundings, could furnish. The fire had burned down into great splendid glowing coals, in which the children, seated before it on the tapestried hearth-rug, saw all sorts of strange faces. Tina had insisted on keeping open the door of the cabinet where the beautiful lady was, because, she said, she must be lonesome in that dark closet by herself.

"I wish she would only smile," she said, as the sharp spires of flame from a new stick of wood which she had just laid on, dancing up, made the face seem to become living and tremulous as if with emotion. "See, Hensel, she looks as if she were going to speak to us."

And hours later the fire still burned in the little boudoir; but the two pretty child-faces lay cheek to cheek in the wide, motherly arms of the sofa, and the shadowy lady seemed to watch over them silently from her lonely recess.

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CHAPTER XVI

SAM LAWSON'S DISCOVERIES

THE evening was closing in sharp and frosty, with a lowering of wind and cloud that rendered fire-light doubly dear and welcome, as we all drew our chairs round the great, glowing fire in my grandmother's kitchen. I had my little block of wood, which served as a footstool, far in the cavernous depths of one end of the fireplace, close by Black Cæsar, who was busy making me a popgun, while my grandmother sat at the other end in her rocking-chair, rattling her knitting-needles. Uncle Fly had just frisked in, and was perched, as was his wont, on the very tip of his chair, where he sat fussily warming and rubbing his hands, much as a meditative bluebottle performs the same operation with his fore feet.

"So," said my grandmother to my grandfather, in reproachful tones, "you 've gone and shut the calf up from its mother."

"To be sure," said my grandfather; "that was foreordained and freely predetermined."

"Well, I say it 's a shame," sputtered my grandmother, — "poor creturs!"

It was a part of the farming ordinance, when the calf was fated to be killed, to separate it for a day from its mother, a proceeding which never failed to excite the indignation of my grandmother, which she expressed always with as much life and freshness as if she had never heard of such a matter before in her life. She was not, to be sure, precisely aware what was to be done about it; but in

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a general way she considered calf-killing as an abominable cruelty, and the parting of calf and cow for a day beforehand as an aggravation. My grandfather was fond of meeting her with a sly use of some of the Calvinistic theological terms which abounded in her favorite writers. The most considerate of husbands often enjoy any quiet method of giving a sly tweak to some cherished peculiarity of their yokefellows; and there was the least suggestion of a smile hovering over my grandfather's face, — which smile, in your quiet man, means two things, — first, that he is going to have his own way in spite of all you can say, and, secondly, that he is quietly amused by your opposition.

"I say it 's a shame," quoth my grandmother, "and I always shall. Hear that poor cow low! She feels as bad as I should."

"Mother," said Aunt Lois, in an impatient tone, "I wonder that you can't learn to let things go on as they must. What would you have? We must have fresh meat sometimes, and you eat as much as any of us."

"I don't care, it 's too bad," said my grandmother, "and I always shall think so. If I had things my way, folks should n't eat creatures at all."

"You 'd be a Brahmin," said my grandfather.

"No, I should n't be a Brahmin, either; but I know an old cow's feelings, and I would n't torment her just to save myself a little trouble."

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of Sam Lawson, who came in with a long, lugubrious face, and an air of solemn, mysterious importance, which usually was the herald of some communication.

"Well, Sam," said my grandfather, "how are you?"

"Middlin', Deacon," said Sam, mournfully, — "only middlin'."

"Sit down, sit down," said my grandfather, "and tell us the news."

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"Wal, I guess I will. How kind o' revivin' and cheerful it does look here," said Sam, seating himself in his usual attitude, with his hands over the fire. "Lordy massy, it 's so different to our house! Hepsy hain't spoke a railly decent word to me since the gineral trainin'. You know, Deacon, Monday, a week ago, was gineral trainin' day over to Hopkinton, and Hepsy, she was set in the idee that I should take her and the young uns to muster. 'All right, Hepsy,' says I, 'ef I can borrow a hoss.' Wal, I walked and walked clean up to Captain Brown's to borrow a hoss, and I could n't get none, and I walked clean down to Bill Peters's, and I could n't get none. Finally, Ned Parker, he lent me his'n. Wal, to be sure, his hoss has got the spring-halt, that kind o' twitches up the waggin, and don't look so genteel as some; but, lordy massy, 't was all I could get. But Hepsy, she blamed me all the same. And then she was at me 'cause she had n't got no gloves. Wal, I had n't no gret o' change in my pocket, and I wanted to keep it for gingerbread and sich for the young uns, so I thought I 'd jest borrow a pair for her, and say nothin'; and I went over and asked Mis' Captain Brown, and over to Miss' Dana's, and round to two or three places; and finally Lady Lothrop, she said she 'd *give* me a old pair o' her'n. And I brought 'em to Hepsy; and do you believe, she throwed 'em right smack in my face. 'S'pose I 'm goin' to wear such an old dirty pair as that?' says she. Wal, arter all, we sot out, and Hepsy, she got clear beat out; and when Hepsy does get beat out she has *spells*, and she goes on awful, and they last day arter day. Hepsy's spells is jest like these 'ere northeast storms, — they never do railly clear off, but kind o' wear out, as 't were, — and this 'ere seems to be about one of her longest. She was at me this mornin' fust thing, 'fore I was out o' bed, cryin' and goin' on, and castin' on it up at me the men she might 'a' hed if she had n't 'a'

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hed me, and the things they 'd 'a' done for her, jest as if 't was my fault. 'Lordy massy, Hepsy,' says I, 'I ain't t' blame. I wish with all my heart you hed 'a' hed any on 'em you 'd ruther.' You see, I wa'n't meanin' no 'fense, you know, but just a-bein' kind o' sympathizin' like, and she flew at me 't oncet. Massy to us! why, you 'd 'a' thought all them old Sodom and Gomorrah sinners biled down wa'n't nothin' to me. She did talk ridiculous. I tried to reason with her. Says I, 'Hepsy, see here now. Here you be in a good bed, in your own house and your kindlin's all split to make your fire, — and I split every one on 'em after twelve o'clock last night, — and you a-goin' on at this 'ere rate. Hepsy,' says I, 'it 's awful.' But lordy massy, how that 'ere woman can talk! She begun agin, and I could n't get in a word edgeways nor crossways nor noways; and so I jest got up and went round to the tavern, and there I met Bill Moss and Jake Marshall, and we had some crackers and cheese and a little suthin' hot with it, and it kind o' 'curred to me, as Hepsy was in one o' her spells, it would be a good time to go kind o' Indianing round the country a spell, till she kind o' come to, ye know. And so I thought I 'd jest go t' other side o' Hopkinton and see Granny Walkers, — her that was housekeeper to Lady Frankland, ye know, — and see if I couldn't rake out the pertickelars of that 'ere Dench house. That 'ere house has been a-lyin' on my mind considerable, along back."

My ears began to prick up with great liveliness and animation at this sound; and, deserting Cæsar, I went over and stood by Sam, and surveyed him with fixed attention, wondering in the meantime how a house could lie on his mind.

"Well," said my grandfather, "what did you hear?"

"Wal, I did n't get over to her house; but when I 'd walked a pretty good piece, I came across Widdah Peters's

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son, Sol Peters, — you know him, Mis' Badger, he lives over in Needmore with a great, spankin' old gal they call Miss Asphyxy Smith. You 've heard of Miss Sphyxy Smith, hain't you, Mis' Badger?"

"Certainly I have," said my grandmother.

"Miss Asphyxia Smith is a smart, industrious woman," said Aunt Lois; "it is n't worth while to talk so about her. The world would be better off," she continued, eyeing Sam with an air of didactic severity, "if there were more people in it that keep to their own business, like Miss Sphyxy."

"Wal, spuz so," said Sam Lawson, with an innocent and virtuous droop, not in the slightest degree recognizing the hint; "but now, you see, I 'm coming to a pint. Sol, he asked me if anybody over to Oldtown had seen or heard anything of a couple of children that had run away from Needmore. There was a boy and a gal about nine or ten or under, that had been put out by the parish. The boy was livin' with Old Crab Smith, and the gal with Miss Sphyxy."

"Well, I pity the child that Miss Sphyxy Smith has taken to bring up, I must say," said my grandmother. "What business have old maids a-taking children to bring up, I want to know? Why, it is n't every hen that 's fit to bring up chickens. How came the children there, anyway?"

"Wal, you see, there come a woman along to Crab Smith's with these 'ere children. Sol says they 're real putty children, — putty-behaved as ever he see. The woman, she was took down and died there. And so Old Crab, he took the boy; and Miss Sphyxy, she took the gal."

"Too bad," said my grandmother; "poor motherless babes, and nobody but Crab and Sphyxy Smith to do for 'em! Somebody ought to see about it."

"Wal, ye see, Sol, he said that Miss Sphyxy was as

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hard as a grindstone on this gal, and they kep' the boy and gal apart, and would n't let 'em see nor speak to each other; and Sol says he never did pity any poor, lonesome little critter as he did that 'ere little gal. She used to lie abed nights, and sob and cry fit to break her little heart."

"I should like to go and talk to that woman!" said my grandmother, vengefully. "I wonder folks can be so mean! I wonder what such folks think of themselves, and where they expect to go to!"

"Wal, you see," continued Sam, "the young un was spicy; and when Miss Sphyxy was down on her too hard, the child, she fit her, — you know a rat 'll bite, a hen will peck, and a worm will turn, — and finally it come to a fight between 'em; and Miss Sphyxy, she gin her an awful whippin'. 'Lordy massy, Sol,' says I, when Sol was a-tellin' me, 'you need n't say nothin' about it. That 'ere gal 's got arms like a windmill; she 's a regular brown thrasher, she is, only she ain't got no music in her; and ef she undertook to thrash me, she 'd make out.'"

"Well, what became of the children?" said my grandmother.

"Wal, you see, they run off together; fact is, Sol says he helped 'em off, and told 'em to come over to Oldtown. He says he told 'em to inquire for Deacon Badger's."

"I believe so," said Aunt Lois, severely. "Every man, woman, and child that wants taking care of is sent straight to our house."

"And good reason they should, Lois," said my grandmother, who was wide awake. "I declare, people ought to be out looking for them. 'Liakim, you are always flying about; why don't you look 'em up?"

Uncle Fly jumped up with alacrity. "To be sure, they ought to be looked after," he said, running to the window. "They ought to be looked after right off; they must be attended to." And Uncle Fly seemed to have an indefi-

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nite intention of pitching straight through the window in pursuit.

Sam Lawson eyed him with a serene gravity. He felt the importance of being possessed of all the information the subject in question admitted of, which he was determined to develop in an easy and leisurely manner, without any undue hurry or heat. "Mr. Sheril," he said, "the fust thing you 'll hev to find out is where they be. It 's no use tearin' round gen'lly. Where be they? — that 's the question."

"To be sure, — to be sure," said Uncle Fly. "Well, what you got to say about that?"

"Wal, you jest set down now, and be kind o' composed. I 'm a-comin' to that 'ere pint in time," said Sam. "That 'ere 's jest what I says to Sol. 'Sol,' says I, 'where be they?' And Sol, he says to me, 'I dunno. They might 'a' gone with the Indians,' says Sol, 'or they might 'a' got lost in the Oldtown woods;' and jest as we was a talkin', we see old Obscue a-comin' along. He was out on a tramp over to Hopkinton, Obscue was, and we asked him about 'em. Wal, Obscue, he says that a gal and boy like what we talked of had slep' in his wife's hut not long sence. You know Obscue's wife; she makes baskets, and goes round sellin' on 'em. I could n't fairly get out o' Obscue what day 't was, nor which way they went arter; but it was clear that them was the ones."

"Then," said Uncle Fly, "they must be somewhere. They may have lost their way in the Oldtown woods, and wandered up and down. There ought to be a party started out to look for 'em to-morrow morning."

"Now look here, Mr. Sheril," said Sam, "I think we 'd better kind o' concentrate our idees on some one pint afore we start out, and I 'll tell you what I 'm a-thinkin' of. You know I was a-tellin' you that I 'd seen smoke coming out o' the chimbly of the Dench house. Now I jest

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thought them poor little robins might have jest got in there. You know it stormed like vengeance last week, and the little critters might have took shelter in that 'ere lonesome old house."

"Poor babes!" said my grandmother. "'Liakim, you go up there and see."

"Well, I tell you," said Uncle Eliakim, "I'll be up bright and early with my old horse and wagon, and go over to the Dench house and see about it."

"Wal, now," said Sam, "if you would n't mind, I'll just ride over with you. I wanted to kind o' go over that 'ere house. I've had it on my mind a good while."

"Is that the haunted house?" said I, in a whisper.

"Wal, it's the one they call haunted, but 't ain't best to be 'fraid of nothin'," said Sam, surveying me paternally, and winking very obviously with one eye at Uncle Eliakim; quite forgetting the long roll of terrible suggestions he had made on the same subject a few evenings before.

"But you told about the man in a long red cloak, and the boy they threw in a well, and a woman in white."

"Lordy massy, what ears young ones has!" said Sam, throwing up his hands pathetically. "I never thought as you was round, Horace; but you must n't never mind nothin' about it. There ain't really no such thing as ghosts."

"I want to go over and see the house," said I.

"Well, well, you shall," said Uncle Fly; "but you must wake up bright and early. I shall be off by six o'clock."

"Well, now, mother," said Aunt Lois, "I just want to know if you are going to make our house an asylum for all the trampers and all the stray children in the neighboring parishes? Have we got to keep these children, or are we going to send 'em back where they belong?"

"Send 'em back to Old Crab Smith and Miss Sphyxy?" said my grandmother. "I'd like to see myself doing that."

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"Well, then, are we going to maintain 'em?" said Aunt Lois; "because I want to know definitely what this is coming to."

"We 'll see," said my grandmother. "It 's our business to do good as we have opportunity. We must n't reap the corners of our fields, nor beat off all our olive-berries, but leave 'em for the poor, the fatherless, and the widow, Scripture says."

"Well, I guess our olive-berries are pretty well beaten off now, and our fields reaped, corners and all," said Lois; "and I don't see why we needs must intermeddle with children that the selectmen in Needmore have put out."

Now Aunt Lois was a first-rate belligerent power in our family circle, and in many cases carried all before her; but my grandmother always bore her down on questions like these, and it was agreed, *nem. con.*, that the expedition to look up the wanderers should take place the next morning.

The matter being thus arranged, Sam settled back with a jocular freedom of manner, surveying the fire, and flopping his hands over it, smiling to himself in a manner that made it evident that he had a further reserve of something on his mind to communicate. "This 'ere Miss Sphyxy Smith's a rich old gal, and 'mazin' smart to work," he began. "Tell you, she holds all she gets. Old Sol, he told me a story 'bout her that was a pretty good un."

"What was it?" said my grandmother.

"Wal, ye see, you 'member old Parson Jeduthun Kendall, that lives up in Stonytown: he lost his wife a year ago last Thanksgiving, and he thought 't was about time he hed another; so he comes down and consults our Parson Lothrop. Says he, 'I want a good, smart, neat, economical woman, with a good property. I don't care nothin' about her bein' handsome. In fact, I ain't particular about anything else,' says he. Wal, Parson Lothrop, says he, 'I think, if that 's the case, I know jest the woman

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to suit ye. She owns a clear, handsome property, and she 's neat and economical; but she 's no beauty.' 'Oh, beauty is nothin' to me,' says Parson Kendall; and so he took the direction. Wal, one day he hitched up his old one-hoss shay, and kind o' brushed up, and started off a-courtin'. Wal, the parson he come to the house, and he was tickled to pieces with the looks o' things outside, 'cause the house is all well shingled and painted, and there ain't a picket loose nor a nail wantin' nowhere.

"'This 'ere 's the woman for me,' says Parson Kendall. So he goes up and raps hard on the front door with his whip-handle. Wal, you see, Miss Sphyxy, she was jest goin' out to help get in her hay. She had on a pair o' clompin' cowhide boots, and a pitchfork in her hand, just goin' out when she heard the rap. So she come jest as she was to the front door. Now you know Parson Kendall 's a little midget of a man; but he stood there on the step kind o' smilin' and genteel, lickin' his lips and lookin' so agreeable! Wal, the front door kind o' stuck, — front doors gen'ally do, ye know, 'cause they ain't opened very often, — and Miss Sphyxy, she had to pull and haul and put to all her strength, and finally it come open with a bang, and she 'peared to the parson, pitchfork and all, sort o' frownin' like.

"'What do you want?' says she; for you see Miss Sphyxy ain't no ways tender to the men.

"'I want to see Miss Asphyxia Smith,' says he, very civil, thinking she was the hired gal.

"'*I*'m Miss Asphyxia Smith,' says she. 'What do you want o' me?'

"Parson Kendall, he jest took one good look on her, from top to toe. 'Nothin',' says he, and turned right round and went down the steps like lightnin'.

"The way she banged that 'ere door, Sol said, was lively. He jumped into his shay, and I tell you his old

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hoss was waked up for once. The way that 'ere old shay spun and bounced was a sight. And when he come to Oldtown, Parson Lothrop was walkin' out in his wig and cocked hat and ruffles, as serene as a pictur, and he took off his hat to him as handsome as a gentleman could; but Parson Kendall, he driv right by and never bowed. He was awful riled, Parson Kendall was; but he could n't say nothin', 'cause he 'd got all he asked for. But the story got out, and Sol and the men heard it, and you 'd 'a' thought they 'd never be done laughin' about it. Sol says, if he was to be hung for it the next minute, he never can help laughin' when he thinks how kind o' scared little Parson Kendall looked when Miss Asphyxia 'peared to him on the doorstep."

"Well, well, well," said Uncle Eliakim, "if we are going to the Dench house to-morrow morning, you must all be up early, for I mean to be off by daylight; and we 'd better all go to bed." With which remark he fluttered out of the kitchen.

"'Liakim 'll be along here by ten o'clock to-morrow," said my grandfather, quietly. "I don't suppose he 's promised more than forty people to do something for them to-morrow morning."

"Yes," said Aunt Lois, "and the linch-pins of the wagon are probably lost, and the tire of the wheels sprung; but he 'll be up before daylight, and maybe get along some time in the forenoon."

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CHAPTER XVII

THE VISIT TO THE HAUNTED HOUSE

My story now approaches a point in which I am soon to meet and begin to feel the force of a train of circumstances which ruled and shaped my whole life. That I had been hitherto a somewhat exceptional child may perhaps have been made apparent in the incidents I have narrated. I was not, in fact, in the least like what an average healthy boy ought to be. My brother Bill was exactly that, and nothing more. He was a good, growing, well-limbed, comfortably disposed animal, reasonably docile, and capable, under fair government, of being made to go exactly in any paths his elders chose to mark out for him.

It had been settled, the night after my father's funeral, that my Uncle Jacob was to have him for a farm-boy, to work in the summer on the farm, and to pick up his education as he might at the district school in the winter season; and thus my mother was relieved of the burden of his support, and Aunt Lois of his superfluous activity in our home department. To me the loss was a small one; for except a very slight sympathy of souls in the matter of fish-hooks and popguns, there was scarcely a single feeling that we had in common. I had a perfect passion for books, and he had a solid and well-pronounced horror of them, which seems to belong to the nature of a growing boy. I could read, as by a kind of preternatural instinct, as soon as I could walk; and reading was with me at ten years a devouring passion. No matter what the book was that was left in my vicinity, I read it as by an irresistible fasci-

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nation. To be sure, I preferred stories, history, and lively narrative, where such material was to be had; but the passion for reading was like hunger, — it must be fed, and, in the absence of palatable food, preyed upon what it could find. So it came to pass that theological tracts, treatises on agriculture, old sermons, — anything, in short, that could be raked out of the barrels and boxes in my grandfather's garret, — would hold me absorbed in some shady nook of the house when I ought to have been out playing as a proper boy should. I did not, of course, understand the half of what I read, and miscalled the words to myself in a way that would have been laughable had anybody heard me; but the strange, unknown sounds stimulated vague and dreamy images in my mind, which were continually seething, changing, and interweaving, like fog-wreaths by moonlight, and formed a phantasmagoria in which I took a quaint and solemn delight.

But there was one peculiarity of my childhood which I have hesitated, with an odd sort of reluctance, to speak of, and yet which so powerfully influenced and determined my life, and that of all with whom I was connected, that it must find some place here. I was, as I said, dreamy and imaginative, with a mind full of vague yearnings. But beside that, through an extreme delicacy of nervous organization, my childish steps were surrounded by a species of vision or apparition so clear and distinct that I often found great difficulty in discriminating between the forms of real life and these shifting shapes, that had every appearance of reality, except that they dissolved at the touch. All my favorite haunts had their particular shapes and forms, which it afforded me infinite amusement to watch in their varying movements.

Particularly at night, after I had gone to bed and the candle was removed from my room, the whole atmosphere around my bed seemed like that which Raphael has shad-

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if she despised them, and laid sticks of wood on the fire with defiant thumps, as much as to say that she knew some things that had got to be in time and place if others were not; but she spake no word.

Aunt Lois, as I have often said before, was a good Christian, and held it her duty to govern her tongue. True, she said many sharp and bitter things; but nobody but herself and her God knew how many more she would have said had she not reined herself up in conscientious silence. But never was there a woman whose silence could express more contempt and displeasure than hers. You could feel it in the air about you, though she never said a word. You could feel it in the rustle of her dress, in the tap of her heels over the floor, in the occasional flash of her sharp, black eye. She was like a thunder-cloud whose quiet is portentous, and from which you every moment expect a flash or an explosion. This whole morning's excursion was contrary to her mind and judgment, — an ill-advised, ill-judged, shiftless proceeding, and being entered on in a way as shiftless.

"What time do you suppose it is, mother?" she at last said to my grandmother, who was busy in her buttery.

"Massy, Lois! I dare n't look," called out my grandmother, who was apt to fall behindhand of her desires in the amount of work she could bring to pass of a morning. "I don't want to know."

"Well, it 's eleven o'clock," said Lois, relentlessly, "and no signs of Uncle 'Liakim yet; and there 's Sam Lawson, I s'pose he 's going to spend the day on our doorstep."

Sam Lawson looked after my Aunt Lois as she went out of the kitchen. "Lordy massy, Horace, I would n't be so kind o' unreconciled as she is all the time for nothin'. Now *I* might get into a fluster 'cause I 'm kep' a-waitin', but I don't. I think it 's our duty to be willin' to wait

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quiet till things come round; this 'ere 's a world where things can't be driv', and folks must n't set their heart on havin' everything come out jes' so, 'cause ef they do they 'll allers be in a stew, like Hepsy and Miss Lois there. Let 'em jest wait quiet, and things allers do come round in the end as well or better 'n ef you worried."

And as if to illustrate and justify this train of thought, Uncle Eliakim's wagon at this moment came round the corner of the street, driving at a distracted pace. The good man came with such headlong speed and vivacity that his straw hat was taken off by the breeze, and flew far behind him, and he shot up to our door, as he usually did that of the meeting-house, as if he were going to drive straight in.

"Lordy massy, Mr. Sheril," said Sam, "don't get out; I 'll get your hat. Horace, you jest run and pick it up; that 's a good boy."

I ran accordingly, but my uncle had sprung out as lively as an autumn grasshopper. "I 've been through a sea of troubles this morning," he said. "I lent my waggin to Jake Marshall yesterday afternoon, to take his wife a ride. I thought if Jake was a mind to pay the poor woman any attention, I 'd help; but when he brought it back last night, one of the bolts was broken, and the harness gave out in two places."

"Want to know!" said Sam, leisurely examining the establishment. "I think the neighbors ought to subscribe to keep up your team, Mr. Sheril, for it 's free to the hull on 'em."

"And what thanks does he get?" said Aunt Lois, sharply. "Well, Uncle 'Liakim, it 's almost dinner-time."

"I know it, I know it, I know it, Lois. But there 's been a lot o' things to do this morning. Just as I got the waggin mended come Aunt Bathsheba Sawin's boy and put me in mind that I promised to carry her corn to grind;

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and I had to stop and take that round to mill; and then I remembered the pills that was to go to Hannah Dexter" —

"I dare say, and forty more things like it," said Aunt Lois.

"Well, jump in now," said Uncle Fly; "we 'll be over and back in no time."

"You may as well put it off till after dinner now," said Aunt Lois.

"Could n't stop for that," said Uncle 'Liakim; "my afternoon is all full now. I 've got to be in twenty places before night." And away we rattled, while Aunt Lois stood looking after us in silent, unutterable contempt.

"Stop! stop! stop! Whoa! whoa!" said Uncle 'Liakim, drawing suddenly up. "There 's that plaster for Widdah Peters, after all. I wonder if Lois would n't just run up with it." By this time he had turned the horse, who ran, with his usual straightforward, blind directness, in a right line, against the doorstep again.

"Well, what now?" said Aunt Lois, appearing at the door.

"Why Lois, I 've just come back to tell you I forgot I promised to carry Widdah Peters that plaster for lumbago; could n't you just find time to run up there with it?"

"Well, give it to me," said Aunt Lois, with sharp precision, and an air of desperate patience.

"Yes, yes, I will," said Uncle Fly, standing up and beginning a rapid search into that series of pockets which form a distinguishing mark of masculine habiliments, — searching with such hurried zeal that he really seemed intent on tearing himself to pieces. "Here 't is! — no, pshaw, pshaw! that 's my handkerchief! — Oh, here! — pshaw, pshaw! Why, where is it? Did n't I put it in? — or did I — Oh, here it is in my vest-pocket; no, though. Where a plague!" and Uncle Fly sprang from the wagon and began his usual active round-and-round chase after himself, slap-

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ping his pockets, now before and now behind, and whirling like a dancing dervish, while Aunt Lois stood regarding him with stony composure.

"If you *could* ever think where anything was, before you began to talk about it, it would be an improvement," she said.

"Well, fact is," said Uncle Eliakim, "now I think of it, Mis' Sheril made me change my coat just as I came out, and that 's the whole on 't. You just run up, Lois, and tell Mis' Sheril to send one of the boys down to Widdah Peters's with the plaster she 'll find in the pocket, — right-hand side. Come now, get up."

These last words were addressed, not to Aunt Lois, but to the horse, who, kept in rather a hungry and craving state by his master's hurrying manner of life, had formed the habit of sedulously improving every spare interval in catching at a mouthful of anything to eat, and had been accordingly busy in cropping away a fringe of very green grass that was growing up by the kitchen doorstep, from which occupation he was remorselessly twitched up and started on an impetuous canter.

"Wal, now I hope we 're fairly started," said Sam Lawson, "and Mr. Sheril, you may as well, while you are about it, take the right road as the wrong one, 'cause that 'ere saves time. It 's pleasant enough anywhere, to be sure, to-day; but when a body 's goin' to a place, a body likes to get there, as it were."

"Well, well, well," said Uncle Fly, "we 're on the right road, ain't we?"

"Wal, so fur you be; but when you come out on the plains, you must take the fust left-hand road that drives through the woods, and you may jest as well know as much aforehand."

"Much obliged to you," said my uncle. "I reely had n't thought particularly about the way."

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"S'pose not," said Sam, composedly; "so it 's jest as well you took me along. Lordy massy, there ain't a road nor a cart-path round Oldtown that I hain't been over, time and time agin. I believe I could get through any on 'em the darkest night that ever was hatched. Jake Marshall and me has been Indianing round these 'ere woods more times'n you could count. It 's kind o' pleasant, a nice bright day like this 'ere, to be a-joggin' along in the woods. Everything so sort o' still, ye know; and ye hear the chestnuts a-droppin', and the wa'nuts. Jake and me, last fall, went up by Widdah Peters's one day, and shuck them trees, and got nigh about a good bushel o' wa'nuts. I used to kind o' like to crack 'em for the young uns, nights, last winter, when Hepsy 'd let 'em sit up. Though she 's allers for drivin' on 'em all off to bed, and makin' it kind o' solitary, Hepsy is." And Sam concluded the conjugal allusion with a deep sigh.

"Have you ever been into the grounds of the Dench house?" said Uncle Fly.

"Wal, no, not reely; but Jake, he has; and ben into the house, too. There was a fellow named 'Biah Smith that used to be a kind o' servant to the next family that come in after Lady Frankland went out, and he took Jake all over it once when there wa'n't nobody there. 'Biah, he said that when Sir Harry lived there, there was one room that was always kept shet up, and want never gone into, and in that 'ere room there was the long red cloak, and the hat and sword, and all the clothes he hed on when he was buried under the ruins in that 'ere earthquake. They said that every year, when the day of the earthquake come round, Sir Harry used to spend it a-fastin' and prayin' in that 'ere room, all alone. 'Biah says that he had talked with a fellow that was one of Sir Harry's body-servants, and he told him that Sir Harry used to come out o' that 'ere room lookin' more like a ghost than a live

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man, when he 'd fasted and prayed for twenty-four hours there. Nobody knows what might have 'peared to him there."

I wondered much in my own quiet way at this story, and marveled whether, in Sir Harry's long, penitential watchings, he had seen the air of the room all tremulous with forms and faces such as glided around me in my solitary hours.

"Naow, you see," said Sam Lawson, "when the earthquake come, Sir Harry, he was a-driving with a court lady; and she, poor soul, went into 'tarnity in a minit, — 'thout a minit to prepare. And I 'spect there ain't no reason to s'pose but what she was a poor, mis'able Roman Catholic. So her prospects could n't have been noways encouragin'. And it must have borne on Sir Harry's mind to think she should be took and he spared, when he was a-cuttin' up just in the way he was. I should n't wonder but she should 'pear to him. You know they say there is a woman in white walks them grounds, and 'Biah, he says, as near as he can find out, it 's that 'ere particular chamber as she allers goes to. 'Biah said he 'd seen her at the windows a wringin' her hands and a-cryin' fit to break her heart, poor soul. Kind o' makes a body feel bad, 'cause, arter all, 't wa'n't her fault she was born a Roman Catholic, — now was it?"

The peculiarity of my own mental history had this effect on me from a child, that it wholly took away from me all dread of the supernatural. A world of shadowy forms had always been as much a part of my short earthly experience as the more solid and tangible one of real people. I had just as quiet and natural a feeling about one as the other. I had not the slightest doubt, on hearing Sam's story, that the form of the white lady did tenant those deserted apartments; and so far from feeling any chill or dread in the idea, I felt only a sort of curiosity to make her acquaintance.

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Our way to the place wound through miles of dense forest. Sir Harry had chosen it, as a retreat from the prying eyes and slanderous tongues of the world, in a region of woodland solitude. And as we trotted leisurely under the bright scarlet and yellow boughs of the forest, Uncle Eliakim and Sam discoursed of the traditions of the place we were going to.

"Who was it bought the place, after Lady Frankland went to England?" said Uncle Eliakim.

"Wal, I believe 't was let, a spell. There was some French folks hed it 'long through the war. I heerd tell that they was pretty high people. I never could quite make out when they went off; there was a good many stories round about it. I did n't clearly make out how 't was, till Dench got it. Dench, you know, got his money in a pretty peculiar way, ef all they says 's true."

"How 's that?" said my uncle.

"Wal, they do say he got the great carbuncle that was at the bottom of Sepaug River. You 've heard about the great carbuncle, I s'pose?"

"Oh, no! do pray tell me about it," said I, interrupting with fervor.

"Why, did n't you never hear 'bout that? want to know. Wal, I 'll tell ye, then. I know all 'bout it. Jake Marshall, he told me that Dench fust told him, and he got it from old Mother Ketury, ye know, — a regelar old heathen Injun, Ketury is, — and folks do go so fur as to say that in the old times Ketury 'd 'a' ben took up for a witch, though I never see no harm in her ways. Ef there be sperits, and we all know there is, what 's the harm o' Ketury 's seein' on 'em?"

"Maybe she can't help seeing them," suggested I.

"Jes' so, jes' so; that 'ere 's what I telled Jake when we 's a-talkin' it over, and he said he did n't like Dench's havin' so much to do with old Ketury. But la, old Ketury

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could say the Lord's Prayer in Injun, 'cause I 've heard her; though she would n't say it when she did n't want to, and she would say it when she did, — jest as the fit took her. But lordy massy, them wild Injuns, they ain't but jest half folks, they 're so kind o' wild, and birchy and bushy as a body may say. Ef they take religion at all, it 's got to be in their own way. Ef you get the wild beast all out o' one on 'em, there don't somehow seem to be enough left to make an ordinary smart man of, so much on 'em 's wild. Anyhow, Dench, he was thick with Ketury, and she told him all about the gret carbuncle, and gin him directions how to get it."

"But I don't know what a great carbuncle is," I interrupted.

"Lordy massy, boy, did n't you never read in your Bible about the New Jerusalem, and the precious stones in the foundation, that shone like the sun? Wal, the carbuncle was one on 'em."

"Did it fall down out of heaven into the river?" said I.

"Mebbe," said Sam. "At any rate Ketury, she told 'em what they had to do to get it. They had to go out arter it jest exactly at twelve o'clock at night, when the moon was full. You was to fast all the day before, and go fastin', and say the Lord's Prayer in Injun afore you went; and when you come to where 't was, you was to dive after it. But there wa'n't to be a word spoke; if there was, it went right off."

"What did they have to say the prayer in Indian for?" said I.

"Lordy massy, boy, I s'pose 't was 'cause 't was Indian sperits kep' a watch over it. Any rate 't was considerable of a pull on 'em, 'cause Ketury, she had to teach 'em; and she wa'n't allers in the sperit on't. Sometimes she 's crosser'n torment, Ketury is. Dench, he gin her fust and last as much as ten dollars, — so Jake says. However,

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they got all through with it, and then come a moonlight night, and they went out. Jake says it was the splendidest moonlight ye ever did see, — all jest as still, — only the frogs and the turtles kind o' peepin'; and they did n't say a word, and rowed out past the pint there, where the water 's ten feet deep, and he looked down and see it a shinin' on the bottom like a great star, making the waters all light like a lantern. Dench, he dived for it, Jake said; and he saw him put his hand right on it; and he was so tickled, you know, to see he 'd got it, that he could n't help hollerin' right out, 'There, you got it!' and it was gone. Dench was mad enough to 'a' killed him, 'cause, when it goes that 'ere way, you can't see it agin for a year and a day. But two or three years arter, all of a sudden, Dench, he seemed to kind o' spruce up and have a deal o' money to spend. He said an uncle had died and left it to him in England; but Jake Marshall says you 'll never take him in that 'ere way. He says he thinks it 's no better 'n witchcraft, getting money that 'ere way. Ye see Jake was to have had half, if they 'd 'a' got it, and not gettin' nothin' kind o' sot him to thinkin' on it in a moral pint o' view, ye know. But, lordy massy, where be we, Mr. Sheril? This 'ere 's the second or third time we 've come round to this 'ere old dead chestnut. We ain't makin' no progress."

In fact there were many and crossing cart-paths through this forest, which had been worn by different farmers of the vicinity in going after their yearly supply of wood; and, notwithstanding Sam's assertion of superior knowledge in these matters, we had, in the negligent inattention of his narrative, become involved in this labyrinth, and driven up and down, and back and forward, in the wood, without seeming at all to advance upon our errand.

"Wall, I declare for 't, I never did see nothing beat it," said Sam. "We 've been goin' jest round and round

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for this hour or more, and come out again at exactly the same place. I 've heerd of places that 's kep' hid, and folks allers gets sort o' struck blind and confused that undertakes to look 'em up. Wal, I don't say I believe in sich stories, but this 'ere is curous. Why, I 'd 'a' thought I could 'a' gone straight to it blindfolded, any day. Ef Jake Marshall was here, he 'd go straight to it."

"Well, Sam," said Uncle Eliakim, "it 's maybe because you and me got so interested in telling stories that we 've missed the way."

"That 'ere 's it, 'thout a doubt," said Sam. "Now I 'll just hush up, and kind o' concentrate my 'tention. I 'll just git out and walk a spell, and take an observation."

The result of this improved attention to the material facts of the case was, that we soon fell into a road that seemed to wind slowly up a tract of rising ground, and to disclose to our view, through an interlacing of distant boughs, the western horizon, toward which the sun was now sinking with long, level beams. We had been such a time in our wanderings, that there seemed a prospect of night setting in before we should be through with our errand and ready to return.

"The house stan's on the top of a sort o' swell o' ground," said Sam; "and as nigh as I can make it out, it must be somewhere about there."

"There is a woman a little way before us," said I; "why don't you ask her?"

I saw very plainly in a turn of the road a woman whose face was hidden by a bonnet, who stood as if waiting for us. It was not the white woman of ghostly memory, but apparently a veritable person in the every-day habiliments of common life, who stood as if waiting for us.

"I don't see no woman," said Sam; "where is she?"

I pointed with my finger, but as I did so the form

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melted away. I remember distinctly the leaves of the trees back of it appearing through it as through a gauze veil, and then it disappeared entirely.

"There is n't any woman that I can see," said Uncle Eliakim briskly. "The afternoon sun must have got into your eyes, boy."

I had been so often severely checked and reproved for stating what I saw, that I now determined to keep silence, whatever might appear to me. At a little distance before us the road forked, one path being steep and craggy, and the other easier of ascent, and apparently going in much the same general direction. A little in advance, in the more rugged path, stood the same female form. Her face was hidden by a branch of a tree, but she beckoned to us. "Take that path, Uncle 'Liakim," said I; "it 's the right one."

"Lordy massy," said Sam Lawson, "how in the world should you know that? That 'ere is the shortest road to the Dench house, and the other leads away from it."

I kept silence as to my source of information, and still watched the figure. As we passed it, I saw a beautiful face with a serene and tender expression, and her hands were raised as if in blessing. I looked back earnestly and she was gone.

A few moments after, we were in the grounds of the place, and struck into what had formerly been the carriage way, though now overgrown with weeds, and here and there with a jungle of what was once well-kept ornamental shrubbery. A tree had been uprooted by the late tempest, and blown down across the road, and we had to make quite a little détour to avoid it.

"Now how are we to get into this house?" said Uncle Eliakim. "No doubt it 's left fastened up."

"Do you see that?" said Sam Lawson, who had been gazing steadily upward at the chimneys of the house, with

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his eyes shaded by one of his great hands. "Look at that smoke from the middle chimbly."

"There 's somebody in the house, to be sure," said Uncle Eliakim; "suppose we knock at the front door here?" — and with great briskness, suiting the action to the word, he lifted the black serpent knocker, and gave such a rat-tat-tat as must have roused all the echoes of the old house, while Sam Lawson and I stood by him, expectant, on the front steps.

Sam then seated himself composedly on a sort of bench which was placed under the shadow of the porch, and awaited the result with the contentment of a man of infinite leisure. Uncle Eliakim, however, felt pressed for time, and therefore gave another long and vehement rap. Very soon a chirping of childish voices was heard behind the door, and a pattering of feet; there appeared to be a sort of consultation.

"There they be now," said Sam Lawson, "jest as I told you."

"Please go round to the back door," said a childish voice; "this is locked, and I can't open it."

We all immediately followed Sam Lawson, who took enormous strides over the shrubbery, and soon I saw the vision of a curly-headed, blue-eyed boy holding open the side door of the house.

I ran up to him. "Are you Harvey?" I said.

"No," he answered; "my name is n't Harvey, it 's Harry; and this is my sister Tina," — and immediately a pair of dark eyes looked out over his shoulder.

"Well, we 've come to take you to my grandmother's house," said I.

I don't know how it was, but I always spoke of our domestic establishment under the style and title of the female ruler. It was grandmother's house.

"I am glad of it," said the boy, "for we have tried two

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or three times to find our way to Oldtown, and got lost in the woods, and had to come back here again."

Here the female partner in the concern stepped a little forward, eager for her share in the conversation. "Do you know old Sol?" she said.

"Lordy massy, I do," said Sam Lawson, quite delighted at this verification of the identity of the children. "Yes, I see him only day afore yesterday, and he was 'quirin' arter you, and we thought we 'd find you over in this 'ere house, 'cause I 'd seen smoke a comin' out o' the chimblies. Had a putty good time in the old house, I reckon. Ben all over it pretty much, hain't ye?"

"Oh yes," said Tina; "and it 's such a strange old place, — a great big house with ever so many rooms in it!"

"Wal, we 'll jest go over it, being as we 're here," said Sam; and into it we all went.

Now there was nothing in the world that little Miss Tina took more native delight in than in playing the hostess. To entertain was her dearest instinct, and she hastened with all speed to open before us all in the old mansion that her own rummaging and investigating talents had brought to light, chattering meanwhile with the spirit of a bobolink.

"You don't know!" she said to Sam Lawson, "what a curious little closet there is in here, with book-cases and drawers, and a looking-glass in the door, with a curtain over it."

"Want to know?" said Sam. "Wal, that 'ere does beat all. It 's some of them old English folks's grander, I s'pose."

"And here 's a picture of such a beautiful lady, that always looks at you, whichever way you go, — just see."

"Lordy massy, so 't does. Wal, now, them drawers, mebbe, have got curous things in 'em," suggested Sam.

"Oh yes, but Harry never would let me look in them.

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I tried, though, once, when Harry was gone; but, if you 'll believe me, they 're all locked."

"Want to know?" said Sam. "That 'ere 's a kind o' pity now."

"Would you open them? You would n't, would you?" said the little one, turning suddenly round and opening her great, wide eyes full on him. "Harry said the place was n't ours, and it would n't be proper."

"Wal, he 's a nice boy; quite right in him. Little folks must n't touch things that ain't their'n," said Sam, who was strong on the moralities; though, after all, when all the rest had left the apartment, I looked back and saw him giving a sly tweak to the drawers of the cabinet on his own individual account.

"I was just a-makin' sure, you know, that 't was all safe," he said, as he caught my eye, and saw that he was discovered.

Sam reveled and expatiated, however, in the information that lay before him in the exploration of the house. No tourist with Murray's guide-book in hand, and with travels to prepare for publication, ever went more patiently through the doing of a place. Not a door was left closed that could be opened; not a passage unexplored. Sam's head came out dusty and cobwebby between the beams of the ghostly old garret, where mouldy relics of antique furniture were reposing, and disappeared into the gloom of the spacious cellars, where the light was as darkness. He found none of the marks of the traditional haunted room; but he prolonged the search till there seemed a prospect that poor Uncle Eliakim would have to get him away by physical force, if we meant to get home in time for supper.

"Mr. Lawson, you don't seem to remember we have n't any of us had a morsel of dinner, and the sun is actually going down. The folks 'll be concerned about us. Come, let 's take the children and be off."

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And so we mounted briskly into the wagon, and the old horse, vividly impressed with the idea of barn and hay at the end of his toils, seconded the vigorous exertions of Uncle Fly, and we rattled and spun on our homeward career, and arrived at the farmhouse a little after moonrise.

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CHAPTER XVIII

TINA'S ADOPTION

DURING the time of our journey to the enchanted ground, my Aunt Lois, being a woman of business, who always knew precisely what she was about, had contrived not only to finish meritoriously her household tasks, and to supplement Uncle Eliakim's forgetful benevolence, but also to make a call on Miss Mehitable Rossiter, for the sake of unburdening to her her oppressed heart. For Miss Mehitable bore in our family circle the repute of being a woman of counsel and sound wisdom. The savor of ministerial stock being yet strong about her, she was much resorted to for advice in difficult cases.

"I don't object, of course, to doing for the poor and orphaned, and all that," said Aunt Lois, quite sensibly; "but I like to see folks seem to know what they are doing, and where they are going, and not pitch and tumble into things without asking what 's to come of them. Now, we 'd just got Susy and the two boys on our hands, and here will come along a couple more children to-night; and I must say I don't see what 's to be done with them."

"It 's a pity you don't take snuff," said Miss Mehitable, with a whimsical grimace. "Now, when I come to any of the cross-places of life, where the road is n't very clear, I just take a pinch of snuff and wait; but as you don't, just stay and get a cup of tea with me, in a quiet, Christian way, and after it we will walk round to your mother's and look at these children."

Aunt Lois was soothed in her perturbed spirit by this

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proposition; and it was owing to this that, when we arrived at home, long after dark, we found Miss Mehitable in the circle around the blazing kitchen fire. The table was still standing, with ample preparations for an evening meal, — a hot smoking loaf of rye-and-Indian bread, and a great platter of cold boiled beef and pork, garnished with cold potatoes and turnips, the sight of which, to a party who had had no dinner all day, was most appetizing.

My grandmother's reception of the children was as motherly as if they had been of her own blood. In fact, their beauty and evident gentle breeding won for them immediate favor in all eyes.

The whole party sat down to the table, and, after a long and somewhat scattering grace, pronounced by Uncle Eliakim, fell to with a most amazing appearance of enjoyment. Sam's face waxed luminous as he buttered great blocks of smoking brown bread with the fruits of my grandmother's morning churning, and refreshed himself by long and hearty pulls at the cider-mug.

"I tell you," he said, "when folks hes been a-ridin' on an empty stomach ever since breakfast, victuals is victuals; we learn how to be thankful for 'em; so I 'll take another slice o' that 'ere beef, and one or two more cold potatoes and the vinegar, Mr. Sheril. Wal, chillen, this 'ere 's better than bein' alone in that 'ere old house, ain't it?"

"Yes, indeed," piped Tina; "I had begun to be quite discouraged. We tried and tried to find our way to Oldtown, and always got lost in the woods." Seeing that this remark elicited sympathy in the listeners, she added, "I was afraid we should die there, and the robins would have to cover us up, like some children papa used to tell about."

"Poor babes! just hear 'em," said my grandmother, who seemed scarcely able to restrain herself from falling on the necks of the children, in the ardor of her motherly

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kindness, while she doubled up an imaginary fist at Miss Asphyxia Smith, and longed to give her a piece of her mind touching her treatment of them.

Harry remained modestly silent; but he and I sat together, and our eyes met every now and then with that quiet amity to which I had been accustomed in my spiritual friend. I felt a cleaving of spirit to him that I had never felt towards any human being before, — a certainty that something had come to me in him that I had always been wanting, — and I was too glad for speech.

He was one of those children who retreat into themselves and make a shield of quietness and silence in the presence of many people, while Tina, on the other hand, was electrically excited, waxed brilliant in color, and rattled and chattered with as fearless confidence as a cat-bird.

"Come hither to me, little maiden," said Miss Mehitable, with a whimsical air of authority, when the child had done her supper. Tina came to her knee, and looked up into the dusky, homely face, in that still, earnest fashion in which children seem to study older people.

"Well, how do you like me?" said Miss Mehitable, when this silent survey had lasted an appreciable time.

The child still considered attentively, looking long into the great, honest, open eyes, and then her face suddenly rippled and dimpled all over like a brook when a sunbeam strikes it. "I do like you. I think you are good," she said, putting out her hands impulsively.

"Then up you come," said Miss Mehitable, lifting her into her lap. "It 's well you like me, because, for aught you know, I may be an old fairy; and if I did n't like you, I might turn you into a mouse or a cricket. Now how would you like that?"

"You could n't do it," said Tina, laughing.

"How do you know I could n't?"

"Well, if you did turn me into a mouse, I 'd gnaw your

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knitting-work," said Tina, laying hold of Miss Mehitable's knitting. "You 'd be glad to turn me back again."

"Heyday! I must take care how I make a mouse of you, I see. Perhaps I 'll make you into a kitten."

"Well, I 'd like to be a kitten, if you 'll keep a ball for me to play with, and give me plenty of milk," said Tina, to whom no proposition seemed to be without possible advantages.

"Will you go home and live with me, and be my kitten?"

Tina had often heard her brother speak of finding a good woman who should take care of her; and her face immediately became grave at this proposal. She seemed to study Miss Mehitable in a new way. "Where do you live?" she said.

"Oh, my house is only a little way from here."

"And may Harry come to see me?"

"Certainly he may."

"Do you want me to work for you all the time?" said Tina; "because," she added, in a low voice, "I like to play sometimes, and Miss Asphyxia said that was wicked."

"Did n't I tell you I wanted you for my little white kitten?" said Miss Mehitable, with an odd twinkle. "What work do you suppose kittens do?"

"Must I grow up and catch rats?" said the child.

"Certainly you will be likely to," said Miss Mehitable, solemnly. "I shall pity the poor rats when you are grown up."

Tina looked in the humorous, twinkling old face with a gleam of mischievous comprehension, and, throwing her arms around Miss Mehitable, said, "Yes, I like you, and I will be your kitten."

There was a sudden, almost convulsive pressure of the little one to the kind old breast, and Miss Mehitable's face wore a strange expression, that looked like the smothered pang of some great anguish blended with a peculiar tender-

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ness. One versed in the reading of spiritual histories might have seen that, at that moment, some inner door of that old heart opened, not without a grating of pain, to give a refuge to the little orphan; but opened it was, and a silent inner act of adoption had gone forth. Miss Mehitable beckoned my grandmother and Aunt Lois into a corner of the fireplace by themselves, while Sam Lawson was entertaining the rest of the circle by reciting the narrative of our day's explorations.

"Now I suppose I 'm about as fit to undertake to bring up a child as the old Dragon of Wantley," said Miss Mehitable; "but as you seem to have a surplus on your hands, I 'm willing to take the girl and do what I can for her."

"Dear Miss Mehitable, what a mercy it 'll be to her!" said my grandmother and Aunt Lois, simultaneously; — "if you feel that you can afford it," added Aunt Lois, considerately.

"Well, the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field are taken care of somehow, as we are informed," said Miss Mehitable. "My basket and store are not much to ask a blessing on, but I have a sort of impression that an orphan child will make it none the less likely to hold out."

"There 'll always be a handful of meal in the barrel and a little oil in the cruse for you, I 'm sure," said my grandmother; "the word of the Lord stands sure for that."

A sad shadow fell over Miss Mehitable's face at these words, and then the usual expression of quaint humor stole over it. "It 's to be hoped that Polly will take the same view of the subject that you appear to," said she. "My authority over Polly is, you know, of an extremely nominal kind."

"Still," said my grandmother, "you must be mistress in your own house. Polly, I am sure, knows her duty to you."

"Polly's idea of allegiance is very much like that of the

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old Spanish nobles to their king; it used to run somewhat thus: 'We, who are every way as good as you are, promise obedience to your government if you maintain our rights and liberties, but if not, not.' Now Polly's ideas of 'rights and liberties' are of a very set and particular nature, and I have found her generally disposed to make a good fight for them. Still, after all," she added, "the poor old thing loves me, and I think will be willing to indulge me in having a doll, if I really am set upon it. The only way I can carry my point with Polly is, to come down on her with a perfect avalanche of certainty, and so I have passed my word to you that I will be responsible for this child. Polly may scold and fret for a fortnight; but she is too good a Puritan to question whether people shall keep their promises. Polly abhors covenant-breaking with all her soul, and so in the end she will have to help me through."

"It's a pretty child," said my grandmother, "and an engaging one, and Polly may come to liking her."

"There's no saying," said Miss Mehitable. "You never know what you may find in the odd corners of an old maid's heart, when you fairly look into them. There are often unused hoards of maternal affection enough to set up an orphan asylum; but it's like iron filings and a magnet, — you must try them with a live child, and if there is anything in 'em you find it out. That little object," she said, looking over her shoulder at Tina, "made an instant commotion in the dust and rubbish of my forlorn old garret, and brought to light a deal that I thought had gone to the moles and the bats long ago. She will do me good, I can feel, with her little pertnesses and her airs and fancies. If you could know how chilly and lonesome an old house gets sometimes, particularly in autumn, when the equinoctial storm is brewing! A lively child is a godsend, even if she turns the whole house topsy-turvy."

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"Well, a child can't always be a plaything," said Aunt Lois; "it 's a solemn and awful responsibility."

"And if I don't take it, who will?" said Miss Mehitable gravely. "If a better one would, I would n't. I 've no great confidence in myself. I profess no skill in human cobbling. I can only give house-room and shelter and love, and let come what will come. 'A man cannot escape what is written on his forehead,' the Turkish proverb says, and this poor child's history is all forewritten."

"The Lord will bless you for your goodness to the orphan," said my grandmother.

"I don't know about its being goodness. I take a fancy to her. I hunger for the child. There 's no merit in wanting your bit of cake, and maybe taking it when it is n't good for you; but let 's hope all 's well that ends well. Since I have fairly claimed her for mine, I begin to feel a fierce right of property in her, and you 'd see me fighting like an old hen with anybody that should try to get her away from me. You 'll see me made an old fool of by her smart little ways and speeches; and I already am proud of her beauty. Did you ever see a brighter little minx?"

We looked across to the other end of the fireplace, where Miss Tina sat perched, with great contentment, on Sam Lawson's knee, listening with wide-open eyes to the accounts he was giving of the haunted house. The beautiful hair that Miss Asphyxia had cut so close had grown with each day, till now it stood up in half rings of reddish gold, through which the fire shone with a dancing light; and her great eyes seemed to radiate brightness from as many points as a diamond.

"Depend upon it, those children are of good blood," said Miss Mehitable, decisively. "You 'll never make me believe that they will not be found to belong in some way to some reputable stock."

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"Well, we know nothing about their parents," said my grandmother, "except what we heard second-hand through Sam Lawson. It was a wandering woman, sick and a stranger, who was taken down and died in Old Crab Smith's house, over in Needmore."

"One can tell, by the child's manner of speaking, that she has been brought up among educated people," said Miss Mehitable. "She is no little rustic. The boy, too, looks of the fine clay of the earth. But it 's time for me to take little Miss Rattlebrain home with me, and get her into bed. Sleep is a gracious state for children, and the first step in my new duties is a plain one." So saying, Miss Mehitable rose, and, stepping over to the other side of the fireplace, tapped Tina lightly on the shoulder. "Come, Pussy," she said, "get your bonnet, and we will go home."

Harry, who had watched all the movements between Miss Mehitable and his sister with intense interest, now stepped forward, blushing very much, but still with a quaint little old-fashioned air of manliness. "Is my sister going to live with you?"

"So we have agreed, my little man," said Miss Mehitable. "I hope you have no objection?"

"Will you let me come and see her sometimes?"

"Certainly; you will always be quite welcome."

"I want to see her sometimes, because my mother left her under my care. I sha'n't have a great deal of time to come in the daytime, because I must work for my living," he said, "but a little while sometimes at night, if you would let me."

"And what do you work at?" said Miss Mehitable, surveying the delicate boy with an air of some amusement.

"I used to pick up potatoes, and fodder the cattle, and do a great many things; and I am growing stronger every day, and by and by can do a great deal more."

"Well said, sonny," said my grandfather, laying his

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hand on Harry's head. "You speak like a smart boy. We can have you down to help tend sawmill."

"I wonder how many more boys will be wanted to help tend sawmill," said Aunt Lois.

"Well, good night, all," said Miss Mehitable starting to go home.

Tina, however, stopped and left her side, and threw her arms round Harry's neck and kissed him. "Good-night now. You 'll come and see me to-morrow," she said.

"May I come too?" I said, almost before I thought.

"Oh, certainly, do come," said Tina, with that warm, earnest light in her eyes which seemed the very soul of hospitality. "*She* 'll like to have you, I know."

"The child is taking possession of the situation at once," said Miss Mehitable. "Well, Brighteyes, you may come too," she added, to me. "A precious row there will be among the old books when you all get together there;" and Miss Mehitable with the gay, tripping figure by her side, left the room.

"Is this great, big, dark house yours?" said the child, as they came under the shadow of a dense thicket of syringas and lilacs that overhung the front of the house.

"Yes, this is Doubting Castle," said Miss Mehitable.

"And does Giant Despair live here?" said Tina. "Mamma showed me a picture of him once in a book."

"Well, he has tried many times to take possession," said Miss Mehitable, "but I do what I can to keep him out, and you must help me."

Saying this she opened the door of a large, old-fashioned room, that appeared to have served both the purposes of a study and parlor. It was revealed to view by the dusky, uncertain glimmer of a wood fire that had burned almost down on a pair of tall brass andirons. The sides of the room were filled to the ceiling with book-cases full of books. Some dark portraits of men and women were

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duskily revealed by the flickering light, as well as a wide, ample-bosomed chintz sofa and a great chintz-covered easy-chair. A table draped with a green cloth stood in a corner by the fire, strewn over with books and writing-materials, and sustaining a large work-basket.

"How dark it is!" said the child.

Miss Mehitable took a burning splinter of the wood, and lighted a candle in a tall, plated candlestick, that stood on the high, narrow mantelpiece over the fireplace. At this moment a side door opened, and a large-boned woman, dressed in a homespun stuff petticoat, with a short, loose sack of the same material, appeared at the door. Her face was freckled; her hair, of a carroty-yellow, was plastered closely to her head and secured by a horn comb; her eyes were so sharp and searching, that, as she fixed them on Tina, she blinked involuntarily. Around her neck she wore a large string of gold beads, the brilliant gleam of which, catching the firelight, revealed itself at once to Tina's eye, and caused her to regard the woman with curiosity.

She appeared to have opened the door with an intention of asking a question; but stopped and surveyed the child with a sharp expression of not very well-pleased astonishment. "I thought you spoke to me," she said, at last, to Miss Mehitable.

"You may warm my bed now, Polly," said Miss Mehitable. "I shall be ready to go up in a few moments."

Polly stood a moment more, as if awaiting some communication about the child; but as Miss Mehitable turned away, and appeared to be busying herself about the fire, Polly gave a sudden windy dart from the room, and closed the door with a bang that made the window-casings rattle.

"Why, what did she do that for?" said Tina.

"Oh, it 's Polly's way; she does everything with all her might," said Miss Mehitable.

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"Don't she like *me?*" said the child.

"Probably not. She knows nothing about you, and she does not like new things."

"But won't she ever like me?" persisted Tina.

"That, my dear, will depend in a great degree on yourself. If she sees that you are good and behave well, she will probably end by liking you; but old people like her are afraid that children will meddle with their things, and get them out of place."

"I mean to be good," said Tina resolutely. "When I lived with Miss Asphyxia, I wanted to be bad, I tried to be bad; but now I am changed. I mean to be good, because you are good to me," and the child laid her head confidingly in Miss Mehitable's lap.

The dearest of all flattery to the old and uncomely is this caressing, confiding love of childhood, and Miss Mehitable felt a glow of pleasure about her dusky old heart at which she really wondered. "Can anything so fair really love me?" she asked herself. Alas! how much of this cheap-bought happiness goes to waste daily! While unclaimed children grow up loveless, men and women wither in lonely, craving solitude.

Polly again appeared at the door. "Your bed's all warm, and you'd better go right up, else what's the use of warming it?"

"Yes, I'll come immediately," said Miss Mehitable, endeavoring steadfastly to look as if she did not see Polly's looks, and to act as if there had of course always been a little girl to sleep with her.

"Come, my little one." *My* little one! Miss Mehitable's heart gave a great throb at this possessive pronoun. It all seemed as strange to her as a dream. A few hours ago, and she sat in the old windy, lonesome house, alone with the memories of dead friends, and feeling herself walking to the grave in a dismal solitude. Suddenly she awoke

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as from a dark dream, and found herself sole possessor of beauty, youth, and love, in a glowing little form, all her own, with no mortal to dispute it. She had a mother's right in a child. She might have a daughter's love. The whole house seemed changed. The dreary, lonesome great hall, with its tall, solemn-ticking clock, the wide, echoing staircase, up which Miss Mehitable had crept, shivering and alone, so many sad nights, now gave back the chirpings of Tina's rattling gayety and the silvery echoes of her laugh, as, happy in her new lot, she danced up the stairway, stopping to ask eager questions on this and that, as anything struck her fancy. For Miss Tina had one of those buoyant, believing natures, born to ride always on the very top crest of every wave, — one fully disposed to accept of good fortune in all its length and breadth, and to make the most of it at once.

"This is *our* home," she said, "is n't it?"

"Yes, darling," said Miss Mehitable, catching her in her arms fondly; "it is *our* home; we will have good times here together."

Tina threw her arms around Miss Mehitable's neck and kissed her. "I 'm so glad! Harry said that God would find us a home as soon as it was best, and now here it comes."

Miss Mehitable set the child down by the side of a great dark wooden bedstead, with tall, carved posts, draped with curious curtains of India linen, where strange Oriental plants and birds, and quaint pagodas and figures in turbans, were all mingled together, like the phantasms in a dream. Then going to a tall chest of drawers, resplendent with many brass handles, which reached almost to the ceiling, she took a bunch of keys from her pocket and unlocked a drawer. A spasm as of pain passed over her face as she opened it, and her hands trembled with some suppressed emotion as she took up and laid down various articles,

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searching for something. At last she found what she wanted, and shook it out. It was a child's nightgown, of just the size needed by Tina. It was yellow with age, but made with dainty care. She sat down by the child and began a movement towards undressing her.

"Shall I say my prayers to you," said Tina, "before I go to bed?"

"Certainly," said Miss Mehitable; "by all means."

"They are rather long," said the child apologetically, — "that is, if I say all that Harry does. Harry said mamma wanted us to say them all every night. It takes some time."

"Oh, by all means say all," said Miss Mehitable.

Tina kneeled down by her and put her hands in hers, and said the Lord's Prayer, and the psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd." She had a natural turn for elocution, this little one, and spoke her words with a grace and an apparent understanding not ordinary in childhood.

"There 's a hymn, besides," she said. "It belongs to the prayer."

"Well, let us have that," said Miss Mehitable.

Tina repeated, —

"One there is above all others
Well deserves the name of Friend;
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end."

She had an earnest, half-heroic way of repeating, and as she gazed into her listener's eyes she perceived, by a subtile instinct, that what she was saying affected her deeply. She stopped, wondering.

"Go on, my love," said Miss Mehitable.

Tina continued, with enthusiasm, feeling that she was making an impression on her auditor: —

"Which of all our friends, to save us,
Could or would have shed his blood?
But the Saviour died to have us
Reconciled in him to God.

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"When he lived on earth abasëd,
Friend of sinners was his name;
Now, above all glory raisëd,
He rejoiceth in the same."

"O my child, where did you learn that hymn?" said Miss Mehitable, to whom the words were new. Simple and homely as they were, they had struck on some inner nerve, which was vibrating with intense feeling. Tears were standing in her eyes.

"It was mamma's hymn," said Tina. "She always used to say it. There is one more verse," she added.

"O for grace our hearts to soften!
Teach us, Lord, at length to love;
We, alas! forget too often
What a Friend we have above."

"Is that the secret of all earthly sorrow, then?" said Miss Mehitable aloud, in involuntary soliloquy. The sound of her own voice seemed to startle her. She sighed deeply, and kissed the child. "Thank you, my darling. It does me good to hear you," she said.

The child had entered so earnestly, so passionately even, into the spirit of the words she had been repeating, that she seemed to Miss Mehitable to be transfigured into an angel messenger, sent to inspire faith in God's love in a darkened, despairing soul. She put her into bed; but Tina immediately asserted her claim to an earthly nature by stretching herself exultingly in the warm bed, with an exclamation of vivid pleasure.

"How different this seems from my cold old bed at Miss Asphyxia's!" she said. "Oh, that horrid woman! how I *hate* her!" she added, with a scowl and a frown, which made the angelhood of the child more than questionable.

Miss Mehitable's vision melted. It was not a child of heaven, but a little mortal sinner, that she was tucking up for the night; and she felt constrained to essay her first effort at moral training.

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"My dear," she said, "did you not say, to-night, 'Forgive us our trespasses, *as* we forgive those who trespass against us'? Do you know what that means?"

"Oh yes," said Tina readily.

"Well, if your Heavenly Father should forgive your sins just *as* you forgive Miss Asphyxia, how would you like that?"

There was a silence. The large bright eyes grew round and reflective, as they peered out from between the sheets and the pillow. At last she said, in a modified voice: "Well, I won't hate her any more. But," she added, with increased vivacity, "I may think she 's hateful, may n't I?"

Is there ever a hard question in morals that children do not drive straight at, in their wide-eyed questioning?

Miss Mehitable felt inclined to laugh, but said gravely: "I would n't advise you to think evil about her. Perhaps she is a poor woman that never had any one to love her, or anything to love, and it has made her hard."

Tina looked at Miss Mehitable earnestly, as if she were pondering the remark. "She told me that she was put to work younger than I was," she said, "and kept at it all the time."

"And perhaps, if you had been kept at work all your life in that hard way, you would have grown up to be just like her."

"Well, then, I 'm sorry for her," said Tina. "There 's nobody loves her, that 's a fact. Nobody can love her, unless it 's God. He loves every one, Harry says."

"Well, good-night, my darling," said Miss Mehitable, kissing her. "I shall come to bed pretty soon. I will leave you a candle," she added; "because this is a strange place."

"How good you are!" said Tina. "I used to be so afraid in the dark, at Miss Asphyxia's; and I was so wicked all day, that I was afraid of God too, at night. I

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used sometimes to think I heard something chewing under my bed; and I thought it was a wolf, and would eat me up."

"Poor little darling!" said Miss Mehitable. "Would you rather I sat by you till you went to sleep?"

"No, thank you; I don't like to trouble you," said the child. "If you leave a candle I sha'n't be afraid. And, besides, I've said my prayers now. I didn't use to say them one bit at Miss Asphyxia's. She would tell me to say my prayers, and then bang the door so hard, and I would feel cross, and think I wouldn't. But I am better now, because you love me."

Miss Mehitable returned to the parlor, and sat down to ponder over her fire; and the result of her ponderings shall be given in a letter which she immediately began writing at the green-covered table.

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CHAPTER XIX

MISS MEHITABLE'S LETTER, AND THE REPLY, GIVING FURTHER HINTS OF THE STORY

My dear Brother, — Since I wrote you last, so strange a change has taken place in my life that even now I walk about as in a dream, and hardly know myself. The events of a few hours have made everything in the world seem to me as different from what it ever seemed before as death is from life.

Not to keep you waiting, after so solemn a preface, I will announce to you first, briefly, what it is, and then, secondly, how it happened.

Well, then, *I have adopted a child*, in my dry and wilted old age. She is a beautiful and engaging little creature, full of life and spirits, — full of warm affections, — thrown an absolute waif and stray on the sands of life. Her mother was an unknown Englishwoman, — probably some relict of the retired English army. She died in great destitution, in the neighboring town of Needmore, leaving on the world two singularly interesting children, a boy and a girl. They were, of course, taken in charge by the parish, and fell to the lot of old Crab Smith and his sister, Miss Asphyxia, — just think of it! I think I need say no more than this about their lot.

In a short time they ran away from cruel treatment; lived in a desolate little housekeeping way in the old Dench house; till finally Sam Lawson, lounging about in his general and universal way, picked them up. He brought them, of course, where every wandering, distressed thing comes, — to Deacon Badger's.

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Now I suppose the Deacon is comfortably off in the world, as our New England farmers go, but his ability to maintain general charges of housekeeping for all mankind may seriously be doubted. Lois Badger, who does the work of Martha in that establishment, came over to me, yesterday afternoon, quite distressed in her mind about it. Lois is a worthy creature, — rather sharp, to be sure, but, when her edge is turned the right way, none the worse for that, — and really I thought she had the right of it, to some extent.

People in general are so resigned to have other folks made burnt sacrifices, that it did not appear to me probable that there was a creature in Oldtown who would do anything more than rejoice that Deacon Badger felt able to take the children. After I had made some rather bitter reflections on the world, and its selfishness, in the style that we all practice, the thought suddenly occurred to me, What do you, more than others? and that idea, together with the beauty and charms of the poor little waif, decided me to take this bold step. I shut my eyes, and took it, — not without quaking in my shoes for fear of Polly; but I have carried my point in her very face, without so much as saying by your leave.

The little one has just been taken up stairs and tucked up warmly in my own bed, with one of our poor little Emily's old nightgowns on. They fit her exactly, and I exult over her as one that findeth great spoil.

Polly has not yet declared herself, except by slamming the door very hard when she first made the discovery of the child's presence in the house. I presume there is an equinoctial gale gathering, but I say nothing; for, after all, Polly is a good creature, and will blow herself round into the right quarter, in time, as our northeast rain-storms generally do. People always accommodate themselves to certainties.

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I cannot but regard the coming of this child to me at this time as a messenger of mercy from God, to save me from sinking into utter despair. I have been so lonely, so miserable, so utterly, inexpressibly wretched of late, that it has seemed that, if something did not happen to help me, I must lose my reason. Our family disposition to melancholy is a hard enough thing to manage under the most prosperous circumstances. I remember my father's paroxysms of gloom: they used to frighten me when I was a little girl, and laid a heavy burden on the heart of our dear angel mother. Whatever that curse is, we all inherit it. In the heart of every one of us children there is that fearful *black drop*, like that which the Koran says the angel showed to Mahomet. It is an inexplicable something which always predisposes us to sadness, but in which any real, appreciable sorrow strikes a terribly deep and long root. Shakespeare describes this thing, as he does everything else: —

> "In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
> It wearies me, — you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 't is made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn."

You have struggled with it by the most rational means, — an active out-of-door life, by sea voyages and severe manual labor. A *man* can fight this dragon as a woman cannot. We women are helpless, — tied to places, forms, and rules, — chained to our stake. We must meet him as we can.

Of late I have not been able to sleep, and, lying awake all night long in darkness and misery, have asked, if *this* be life, whether an immortal existence is not a curse to be feared, rather than a blessing to be hoped, and if the wretchedness we fear in the eternal world can be worse than what we sometimes suffer now, — such sinking of heart, such helplessness of fear, such a vain calling for help that never comes. Well, I will not live it over again, for

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I dare say you know it all too well. I think I finally wore myself out in trying to cheer poor brother Theodore's darksome way down to death. Can you wonder that he would take opium? God alone can judge people that suffer as he did, and, let people say what they please, I must, I will, think that God has some pity for the work of his hands.

Now, brother, I must, I will, write to you about Emily, though you have said you never wished to hear her name again. What right had you, her brother, to give her up so, and to let the whole burden of this dreadful mystery and sorrow come down on me alone? You are not certain that she has gone astray in the worst sense that a woman can. We only know that she has broken away from us and gone, — but where, how, and with whom, you cannot say, nor I. And certainly there was great excuse for her. Consider how the peculiar temperament and constitution of our family wrought upon her. Consider the temptations of her wonderful beauty, her highly nervous, wildly excitable organization. Her genius was extraordinary; her strength and vigor of character quite as much so. Altogether, she was a perilously constituted human being, — and what did we do with her? A good, common girl might have been put with Uncle and Aunt Farnsworth with great advantage. We put her there for the simple reason that they were her aunt and uncle, and had money enough to educate her. But in all other respects they were about the most unsuited that could be conceived. I must say that I think that glacial, gloomy, religious training in Uncle Farnsworth's family was, for her, peculiarly unfortunate. She sat from Sunday to Sunday under Dr. Stern's preaching. With a high-keyed, acute mind, she could not help listening and thinking; and such thinking is unfortunate, to say the least.

It always seemed to me that he was one of those who experiment on the immortal soul as daring doctors experi-

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ment on the body, — using the most violent and terrible remedies, — remedies that must kill or cure. His theory was, that a secret enemy to God was lying latent in every soul, which, like some virulent poisons in the body, could only be expelled by being brought to the surface; and he had sermon after sermon, whose only object appeared to be to bring into vivid consciousness what he calls the natural opposition of the human heart.

But, alas! in some cases the enmity thus aroused can never be subdued; and Emily's was a nature that would break before it would bow. Nothing could have subdued her but love, — and love she never heard. These appalling doctrines were presented with such logical clearness, and apparently so established from the Scriptures, that, unable to distinguish between the word of God and the cruel deductions of human logic, she trod both under foot in defiant despair. Then came in the French literature, which is so fascinating, and which just now is having so wide an influence on the thinking of our country. Rousseau and Voltaire charmed her, and took her into a new world. She has probably gone to France for liberty, with no protection but her own virgin nature. Are we at once to infer the worst, when we know so little? I, for one, shall love her and trust in her to the end; and if ever she should fall, and do things that I and all the world must condemn, I shall still say, that it will be less her fault than that of others; that she will be one of those who fall by their higher, rather than their lower nature.

I have a prophetic instinct in my heart that some day, poor, forlorn, and forsaken, she will look back with regret to the old house where she was born: and then she shall be welcome here. This is why I keep this solitary old place, full of bitter and ghostly memories; because, as long as I keep it, there is one refuge that Emily may call her own, and one heart that will be true to her, and love her and believe in her to the end.

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I think God has been merciful to me in sending me this child, to be to me as a daughter. Already her coming has been made a means of working in me that great moral change for which all my life I have been blindly seeking. I have sought that *conversion* which our father taught us to expect as alchemists seek the philosopher's stone.

What have I not read and suffered at the hands of the theologians? How many lonely hours, day after day, have I bent the knee in fruitless prayer that God would grant me this great, unknown grace! for without it how dreary is life!

We are in ourselves so utterly helpless, — life is so hard, so inexplicable, that we stand in perishing need of some helping hand, some sensible, appreciable connection with God. And yet for years every cry of misery, every breath of anguish, has been choked by the logical proofs of theology; — that God is my enemy, or that I am his; that every effort I make toward Him but aggravates my offense; and that this unknown gift, which no child of Adam ever did compass of himself, is so completely in my own power, that I am every minute of my life to blame for not possessing it.

How many hours have I gone round and round this dreary track, — chilled, weary, shivering, seeing no light, and hearing no voice! But within this last hour it seems as if a divine ray had shone upon me, and the great gift had been given me by the hand of a little child. It came in the simplest and most unexpected manner, while listening to a very homely hymn, repeated by this dear little one. The words themselves were not much in the way of poetry; it was merely the simplest statement of the truth that in Jesus Christ, ever living, ever present, every human soul has a personal friend, divine and almighty.

This thought came over me with such power, that it seemed as if all my doubts, all my intricate, contradictory

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theologies, all those personal and family sorrows which had made a burden on my soul greater than poor Christian ever staggered under, had gone where his did, when, at the sight of the Cross, it loosed from his back and rolled down into the sepulchre, to be seen no more. Can it be, I asked myself, that this mighty love, that I feel so powerfully and so sweetly, has been near me all these dark, melancholy years? Has the sun been shining behind all these heavy clouds, under whose shadows I have spent my life?

When I laid my little Tina down to sleep to-night, I came down here to think over this strange, new thought, — that I, even I, in my joyless old age, my poverty, my perplexities, my loneliness, am no longer alone! I am beloved. There is One who does love me, — the One Friend, whose love, like the sunshine, can be the portion of each individual of the human race, without exhaustion. This is the great mystery of faith, which I am determined from this hour to keep whole and undefiled.

My dear brother, I have never before addressed to you a word on this subject. It has been one in which I saw only perplexity. I have, it is true, been grieved and disappointed that you did not see your way clear to embrace the sacred ministry, which has for so many generations been the appointed work of our family. I confess for many years I did hope to see you succeed, not only to the library, but to the work of our honored, venerated father and grandfather. It was my hope that, in this position, I should find in you a spiritual guide to resolve my doubts and lead me aright. But I have gathered from you at times, by chance words dropped, that you could not exactly accept the faith of our fathers. Perhaps difficulties like my own have withheld you. I know you too well to believe that the French skepticism that has blown over here with the breath of our political revolution can have had the least influence over you. Whatever your views of doctrines

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may be, you are not a doubter. You are not — as poor Emily defiantly called herself — a deist, an alien from all that our fathers came to this wilderness to maintain. Yet when I see you burying your talents in a lonely mountain village, satisfied with the work of a poor schoolmaster, instead of standing forth to lead our New England in the pulpit, I ask myself, Why is this?

Speak to me, brother! tell me your innermost thoughts, as I have told you mine. Is not life short and sad and bitter enough, that those who could help each other should neglect the few things they can do to make it tolerable? Why do we travel side by side, lonely and silent, — each perhaps, hiding in that silence the bread of life that the other needs? Write to me as I have written to you, and let me know that I have a brother in soul, as I have in flesh.

Your affectionate sister,

M. R.

My dear Sister, — I have read your letter. Answer it justly and truly, how can I? How little we know of each other in outside intimacy! but when we put our key into the door of the secret chamber, who does not tremble and draw back? — *that* is the true haunted chamber!

First, about Emily, I will own I am wrong. It is from no want of love, though, but from too much. I was and am too sore and bitter on that subject to trust myself. I have a heart full of curses, but don't know exactly where to fling them; and, for aught I see, we are utterly helpless. Every clue fails; and what is the use of torturing ourselves? It is a man's nature to act, to do, and, where nothing can be done, to forget. It is a woman's nature to hold on to what can only torture, and live all her despairs over. Women's tears are their meat; men find the diet too salt, and won't take it.

Tell me anything I can do, and I'll do it; but talk I

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cannot, — every word burns me. I admit every word you say of Emily. We were mistaken in letting her go to the Farnsworths, and be baited and tortured with ultra-Calvinism: but we were blind, as we mortals always are, — fated never to see what we should have done, till seeing is too late.

I am glad you have taken that child, — first, because it 's a good deed in itself, and, secondly, because it 's good for you. That it should have shed light on your relations to God is strictly philosophical. You have been trying to find your way to Him by definitions and by logic; one might as well make love to a lady by the first book of Euclid. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" That throb of protecting, all-embracing love which thrilled through your heart for this child taught you more of God than father's whole library. "He that loveth not knoweth not God." The old Bible is philosophical, and eminent for its common sense. Of course this child will make a fool of you. Never mind; the follies of love are remedial.

As to a system of education, it will be an amusement for you to get that up. Every human being likes to undertake to dictate for some other one. Go at it with good cheer. But, whatever you do, don't teach her French. Give her a good Saxon-English education; and, if she needs a pasture-land of foreign languages, let her learn Latin, and, more than that, Greek. Greek is the morning-land of languages, and has the freshness of early dew in it which will never exhale.

The French helped us in our late war: for that I thank them; but from French philosophy and French democracy, may the good Lord deliver us. They slew their Puritans in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the nation ever since has been without a moral sense. French literature is like an eagle with one broken wing. What the Puritans

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did for us English people, in bringing in civil liberty, they lacked. Our revolutions have been gradual. I predict that theirs will come by and by with an explosion.

Meanwhile, our young men who follow after French literature become rakes and profligates. Their first step in liberty is to repeal the ten commandments, especially the seventh. Therefore I consider a young woman in our day misses nothing who does not read French. Decorous French literature is stupid, and bright French literature is too wicked for anything. So let French alone.

She threatens to be pretty, does she? So much the worse for you and her. If she makes you too much trouble by and by, send her up to my academy, and I will drill her, and make a Spartan of her.

As to what you say about religion, and the ministry, and the schoolmaster, what can I say on this sheet of paper? Briefly then. No, I am not in any sense an unbeliever in the old Bible; I would as soon disbelieve my own mother. And I am in my nature a thorough Puritan. I am a Puritan as thoroughly as a hound is a hound, and a pointer a pointer, whose pedigree of unmixed blood can be traced for generations back. I feel within me the preaching instinct, just as the hound snuffs, and the pointer points; but as to the pulpit in these days, — well, thereby hangs a tale.

What should I preach, supposing I were a minister, as my father, and grandfather, and great-grandfather were before me? What they preached was true to them, was fitted for their times, was loyally and sincerely said, and of course did a world of good. But when I look over their sermons, I put an interrogation point to almost everything they say; and what was true to them is not true to me; and if I should speak out as honestly as they did what is true to me, the world would not understand or receive it, and I think it would do more harm than good. I believe

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I am thinking ahead of the present generation, and if I should undertake to push my thoughts I should only bother people, — just as one of my bright boys in the latter part of the algebra sometimes worries a new beginner with his advanced explanations.

Then again, our late Revolution has wrought a change in the ministry that will soon become more and more apparent. The time when ministers were noblemen by divine right, and reigned over their parishes by the cocked hat and gold-headed cane, is passing away. Dr. Lothrop, and Dr. Stern, and a few others, keep up the prestige, but that sort of thing is going by; and in the next generation the minister will be nothing but a citizen; his words will come without prestige, and be examined and sifted just like the words of any other citizen.

There is a race of ministers rising up who are fully adequate to meet this exigency; and these men are going to throw Calvinism down into the arena, and discuss every inch of it, hand to hand and knee to knee, with the common people; and we shall see what will come of this.

I, for my part, am not prepared to be a minister on these terms. Still, as I said, I have the born instinct of preaching; I am dictatorial by nature, and one of those who need constantly to see themselves reflected in other people's eyes; and so I have got an academy here, up in the mountains, where I have a set of as clear, bright-eyed, bright-minded boys and girls as you would wish to see, and am in my way a pope. Well, I enjoy being a pope. It is one of my weaknesses.

As to society, we have the doctor, — a quiet little wrinkled old man, a profound disbeliever in medicines, who gives cream-of-tartar for ordinary cases, and camomile tea when the symptoms become desperate, and reads Greek for his own private amusement. Of course he doesn't get very rich, but here in the mountains one can afford to be

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poor. One of our sunsets is worth half a Boston doctor's income.

Then there 's the lawyer and squire, who draws the deeds, and makes the wills, and settles the quarrels; and the minister, who belongs to the new dispensation. He and I are sworn friends; he is my Fidus Achates. His garden joins mine, and when I am hoeing my corn he is hoeing his, and thence comes talk. As it gets more eager I jump the fence and hoe in his garden, or he does the same to mine. We have a strife on the matter of garden craft, who shall with most skill outwit our Mother Nature, and get cantelopes and melons under circumstances in which she never intended them to grow. This year I beat the parson, but I can see that he is secretly resolved to revenge himself on me when the sweet corn comes in. One evening every week we devote to reading the newspaper and settling the affairs of the country. We are both stanch Federalists, and make the walls ring with our denunciations of Jacobinism and Democracy. Once a month we have the Columbian Magazine and the foreign news from Europe, and then we have a great deal on our hands; we go over affairs, every country systematically, and settle them for the month. In general we are pretty well agreed, but now and then our lines of policy differ, and then we fight it out with good courage, not sparing the adjectives. The parson has a sly humor of his own, and our noisiest discussions generally end in a hearty laugh.

So much for the man and friend, — now for the clergyman. He is neither the sentimental, good parson of Goldsmith, nor the plaintive, ascetic parish priest of Romanism, nor the cocked hat of the theocracy, but a lively, acute, full-blooded *man*, who does his duty on equal terms among men. He is as single-hearted as an unblemished crystal, and in some matters sacredly simple; but yet not without a thrifty practical shrewdness, both in things temporal and

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things spiritual. He has an income of about two hundred and fifty dollars, with his wood. The farmers about here consider him as rolling in wealth, and I must say that, though the parsonage is absolutely bare of luxuries, one is not there often unpleasantly reminded that the parson is a poor man. He has that golden faculty of enjoying the work he does so utterly, and believing in it so entirely, that he can quite afford to be poor. He whose daily work is in itself a pleasure ought not to ask for riches: so I tell myself about my school-keeping, and him about his parish. He takes up the conversion of sinners as an immediate practical business, to be done and done now; he preaches in all the little hills and dales and hollows and brown schoolhouses for miles around, and chases his sinners up and down so zealously, that they have, on the whole, a lively time of it. He attacks drinking and all our small forms of country immorality with a vigor sufficient to demolish sins of double their size, and gives nobody even a chance to sleep in meeting. The good farmers around here, some of whom would like to serve Mammon comfortably, are rather in a quandary what to do. They never would bear the constant hounding which he gives them, and the cannonades he fires at their pet sins, and the way he chases them from pillar to post, and the merciless manner in which he breaks in upon their comfortable old habit of sleeping in meeting, were it not that they feel that they are paying him an enormous salary, and ought to get their money's worth out of him, which they are certain they are doing most fully. Your Yankee has such a sense of values, that, if he pays a man to thrash him, he wants to be thrashed thoroughly.

My good friend preaches what they call New Divinity, by which I understand the Calvinism which our fathers left us, in the commencing process of disintegration. He is thoroughly and enthusiastically in earnest about it, and

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believes that the system, as far as Edwards and Hopkins have got it, is almost absolute truth; but, for all that, is cheerfully busy in making some little emendations and corrections, upon which he values himself, and which he thinks of the greatest consequence. What is to the credit of his heart is, that these emendations are generally in favor of some original-minded sheep who can't be got into the sheep-fold without some alteration in the paling. In these cases I have generally noticed that he will loosen a rail or tear off a picket, and let the sheep in, it being his impression, after all, that the sheep are worth more than the sheep-fold.

In his zeal to catch certain shy sinners, he has more than once preached sermons which his brethren about here find fault with, as wandering from old standards; and it costs abundance of bustle and ingenuity to arrange his system so as to provide for exceptional cases, and yet to leave it exactly what it was before the alterations were made.

It is, I believe, an admitted thing among theologians, that, while theology must go on improving from age to age, it must also remain exactly what it was a hundred years ago.

The parson is my intimate friend, and it is easy for me to see that he has designs for the good of my soul, for which I sincerely love him. I can see that he is lying in wait for me patiently, as sometimes we do for trout, when we go out fishing together. He reconnoitres me, approaches me carefully, makes nice little logical traps to catch me in, and baits them with very innocent-looking questions, which I, being an old theological rat, skillfully avoid answering.

My friend's forte is logic. Between you and me, if there is a golden calf worshiped in our sanctified New England, its name is Logic; and my good friend the parson burns incense before it with a most sacred innocence of intention. He believes that sinners can be converted by

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logic, and that, if he could once get me into one of these neat little traps aforesaid, the salvation of my soul would be assured. He has caught numbers of the shrewdest infidel foxes among the farmers around, and I must say that there is no trap for the Yankee like the logic-trap.

I must tell you a story about this that amused me greatly. You know everybody's religious opinions are a matter of discussion in our neighborhood, and Ezekiel Scranton, a rich farmer who lives up on the hill, enjoys the celebrity of being an atheist, and rather values himself on the distinction. It takes a man of courage, you know, to live without a God; and Ezekiel gives himself out as a plucky dog, and able to hold the parson at bay. The parson, however, had privately prepared a string of questions which he was quite sure would drive Ezekiel into strait quarters. So he meets him the other day in the store.

"How 's this, Mr. Scranton? they tell me that you 're an atheist!"

"Well, I guess I be, Parson," says Ezekiel comfortably.

"Well, Ezekiel, let 's talk about this. You believe in your own existence, don't you?"

"No, I don't."

"What! not believe in your own existence?"

"No, I don't." Then, after a moment, "Tell you what, Parson, ain't a-going to be twitched up by none o' your syllogisms."

Ezekiel was quite in the right of it; for I must do my friend the parson the justice to say, that, if you answer one of his simple-looking questions, you are gone. You must say B after saying A, and the whole alphabet after that.

For my part, I do not greatly disbelieve the main points of Calvinism. They strike me, as most hard and disagreeable things do, as quite likely to be true, and very much in accordance with a sensible man's observation of facts as they stand in life and nature. My doubts come up, like

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bats, from a dark and dreadful cavern that underlies all religion, natural or revealed. They are of a class abhorrent to myself, smothering to my peace, embittering to my life.

What must he be who is tempted to deny the very right of his Creator to the allegiance of his creatures? — who is tempted to feel that his own conscious existence is an inflicted curse, and that the whole race of men have been a set of neglected, suffering children, bred like fish-spawn on a thousand shores, by a Being who has never interested himself to care for their welfare, to prevent their degradation, to interfere with their cruelties to each other, as they have writhed and wrangled into life, through life, and out of life again? Does this look like being a Father in any sense in which we poor mortals think of fatherhood? After seeing nature, can we reason against any of the harshest conclusions of Calvinism, from the character of its Author?

Do we not consider a man unworthy the name of a good father who, from mere blind reproductive instinct, gives birth to children for whose improvement, virtue, and happiness he makes no provision? and yet does not this seem to be the way more than half of the human race actually comes into existence?

Then the laws of nature are an inextricable labyrinth, — puzzling, crossing, contradictory; and ages of wearisome study have as yet hardly made a portion of them clear enough for human comfort; and doctors and ministers go on torturing the body and the soul, with the most devout good intentions. And so forth, for there is no end to this sort of talk.

Now my friend the parson is the outgrowth of the New England theocracy, about the simplest, purest, and least objectionable state of society that the world ever saw. He has a good digestion, a healthy mind in a healthy body; he lives in a village where there is no pauperism, and hardly any crime, — where all the embarrassing, dreadful

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social problems and mysteries of life scarcely exist. But I, who have been tumbled up and down upon all the shores of earth, lived in India, China, and Polynesia, and seen the human race as they breed like vermin, in their filth and their contented degradation, — how can I think of applying the measurements of any theological system to a reality like this?

Now the parts of their system on which my dear friend the parson, and those of his school, specially value themselves, are their explanations of the reasons why evil was permitted, and their vindications of the Divine character in view of it. They are specially earnest and alert in giving out their views here, and the parson has read to me more than one sermon, hoping to medicate what he supposes to be my secret wound. To me their various theories are, as my friend the doctor once said to me, "putting their bitter pill in a chestnut-burr; the pill is bad, — there is no help for that, — but the chestnut-burr is impossible."

It is incredible, the ease and cheerfulness with which a man in his study, who never had so much experience of suffering as even a toothache would give him, can arrange a system in which the everlasting torture of millions is casually admitted as an item. But I, to whom, seriously speaking, existence has been for much of my life nothing but suffering, and who always looked on my existence as a misfortune, must necessarily feel reasonings of this kind in a different way. This soul-ache, this throb of pain, that seems as if it were an actual anguish of the immaterial part itself, is a dreadful teacher, and gives a fearful sense of what the chances of an immortal existence might be, and what the responsibilities of originating such existence.

I am not one of the shallow sort, who think that everything for everybody must or ought to end with perfect bliss at death. On the contrary, I do not see how anything but misery in eternal ages is to come from the outpouring into

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their abyss, of wrangling, undisciplined souls, who were a torment to themselves and others here, and who would make this world unbearable, were they not all swept off in their turn by the cobweb brush of Death.

So you see it 's all a hopeless muddle to me. Do I then believe nothing? Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ with all my heart, all my might. He stands before me the one hopeful phenomenon of history. I adore him as Divine, or all of the Divine that I can comprehend; and when he bids me say to God, "Our Father which art in heaven," I smother all my doubts and say it. Those words are the rope thrown out to me, choking in the waters, — the voice from the awful silence. "God *so* loved the world that he gave his own Son." I try to believe that he *loves* this world, but I have got only so far as "Help thou mine unbelief."

Now, as to talking out all this to the parson, what good would it do? He is preaching well and working bravely. His preaching suits the state of advancement to which New England has come; and the process which he and ministers of his sort institute, of having every point in theology fully discussed by the common people, is not only a capital drill for their minds, but it will have its effect in the end on their theologies, and out of them all the truth of the future will arise.

So you see my position, and why I am niched here for life, as a schoolmaster. Come up and see me some time. I have a housekeeper who is as ugly as Hecate, but who reads Greek. She makes the best bread and cake in town, keeps my stockings mended and my shirt-ruffles plaited and my house like wax, and hears a class in Virgil every day, after she has "done her dinner-dishes." I shall not fall in love with her, though. Come some time to see me, and bring your new acquisition. Your brother,

JONATHAN ROSSITER.

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I have given these two letters as the best means of showing to the reader the character of the family with whom my destiny and that of Tina became in future life curiously intertwisted.

Among the peculiarly English ideas which the Colonists brought to Massachusetts, which all the wear and tear of democracy have not been able to obliterate, was that of family. Family feeling, family pride, family hope and fear and desire, were, in my early day, strongly marked traits. Genealogy was a thing at the tip of every person's tongue, and in every person's mind, and it is among my most vivid remembrances, with what a solemn air of intense interest my mother, grandmother, Aunt Lois, and Aunt Keziah would enter into minute and discriminating particulars with regard to the stock, intermarriages, and family settlements of the different persons whose history was under their consideration. "Of a very respectable family," was a sentence so often repeated at the old fireside that its influence went in part to make up my character. In our present days, when every man is emphatically the son of his own deeds, and nobody cares who his mother or grandmother or great-aunt was, there can scarcely be an understanding of this intense feeling of race and genealogy which pervaded simple colonial Massachusetts.

As I have often before intimated, the aristocracy of Massachusetts consisted of two classes, the magistracy and the ministry; and these two, in this theocratic State, played into each other's hands continually. Next to the magistrate and the minister, in the esteem of that community, came the schoolmaster; for education might be said to be the ruling passion of the State.

The history of old New England families is marked by strong lights and deep shadows of personal peculiarity. We appeal to almost every old settler in New England towns, if he cannot remember stately old houses, inhabited

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by old families, whose histories might be brought to mind by that of Miss Mehitable and her brother. There was in them a sort of intellectual vigor, a ceaseless activity of thought, a passion for reading and study, and a quiet brooding on the very deepest problems of mental and moral philosophy. The characteristic of such families is the greatly disproportioned force of the internal, intellectual, and spiritual life to the external one. Hence come often morbid and diseased forms of manifestation. The threads which connect such persons with the real life of the outer world are so fine and so weak, that they are constantly breaking and giving way here and there, so that, in such races, oddities and eccentricities are come to be accepted only as badges of family character. Yet from stock of this character have come some of the most brilliant and effective minds in New England; and from them also have come hermits and recluses, — peculiar and exceptional people, — people delightful to the student of human nature, but excessively puzzling to the every-day judgment of mere conventional society.

The Rossiter family had been one of these. It traced its origin to the colony which came out with Governor Winthrop. The eldest Rossiter had been one of the ejected ministers, and came from a good substantial family of the English gentry. For several successive generations there had never been wanting a son in the Rossiter family to succeed to the pulpit of his father. The Rossiters had been leaned on by the magistrates and consulted by the governors, and their word had been law down to the time of Miss Mehitable's father.

The tendency of the stately old families of New England to constitutional melancholy has been well set forth by Dr. Cotton Mather, that delightful old New England grandmother, whose nursery tales of its infancy and childhood may well be pondered by those who would fully understand

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its far-reaching maturity. As I have before remarked, I have high ideas of the wisdom of grandmothers, and therefore do our beloved gossip, Dr. Cotton Mather, the greatest possible compliment in granting him the title.

The ministers of the early colonial days of New England, though well-read, scholarly men, were more statesmen than theologians. Their minds ran upon the actual arrangements of society, which were in a great degree left in their hands, rather than on doctrinal and metaphysical subtilties. They took their confession of faith just as the great body of Protestant reformers left it, and acted upon it as a practical foundation, without much further discussion, until the time of President Edwards. He was the first man who began the disintegrating process of applying rationalistic methods to the accepted doctrines of religion, and he rationalized far more boldly and widely than any publishers of his biography have ever dared to let the world know. He sawed the great dam and let out the whole waters of discussion over all New England, and that free discussion led to all the shades of opinion of our modern days. Little as he thought it, yet Waldo Emerson and Theodore Parker were the last results of the current set in motion by Jonathan Edwards.

Miss Mehitable Rossiter's father, during the latter part of his life, had dipped into this belt of New Divinity, and been excessively and immoderately interested in certain speculations concerning them. All the last part of his life had been consumed in writing a treatise in opposition to Dr. Stern, another rigorous old cocked-hat of his neighborhood, who maintained that the Deity had created sin on purpose, because it was a necessary means of the greatest good. Dr. Rossiter thought that evil had only been permitted, because it could be overruled for the greatest good; and each of them fought their battle as if the fate of the universe was to be decided by its results.

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Considered as a man, in his terrestrial and mundane relations, Dr. Rossiter had that wholesome and homely interest in the things of this mortal life which was characteristic of the New England religious development. While the Puritans were intensely interested in the matters of the soul, they appeared to have a realizing sense of the fact that a soul without a body, in a material world, is at a great disadvantage in getting on. So they exhibited a sensible and commendable sense of the worth of property. They were especially addicted to lawful matrimony, and given to having large families of children; and, if one wife died, they straightway made up the loss by another, — a compliment to the virtues of the female sex which womankind appear always gratefully to appreciate.

Parson Rossiter had been three times married; first, to a strong-grained, homely, highly intellectual woman of one of the first Boston families, of whom Miss Mehitable Rossiter was the only daughter. The Doctor was said to be one of the handsomest men of his times. Nature, with her usual perversity in these matters, made Miss Mehitable an exact reproduction of all the homely traits of her mother, with the addition of the one or two physical defects of her handsome father. No woman with a heart in her bosom ever feels marked personal uncomeliness otherwise than as a great misfortune. Miss Mehitable bore it with a quaint and silent pride. Her brother Jonathan, next to herself in age, the son of a second and more comely wife, was far more gifted in personal points, though not equal to his father. Finally, late in life, after a somewhat prolonged widowhood, Parson Rossiter committed the folly of many men on the downhill side of life, that of marrying a woman considerably younger than himself. She was a pretty, nervous, excitable, sensitive creature, whom her homely elder daughter, Miss Mehitable, no less than her husband, petted and caressed on account of her beauty, as if she had

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been a child. She gave birth to two more children, a son named Theodore, and a daughter named Emily, and then died.

All the children had inherited from their father the peculiar constitutional tendency to depression of spirits of which we have spoken. In these last two, great beauty and brilliant powers of mind were united with such a singular sensitiveness and waywardness of nature as made the prospect for happiness in such a life as this, and under the strict requirements of New England society, very problematical.

Theodore ran through a brilliant course in college, notwithstanding constant difficulties with the college authorities, but either could not or would not apply himself to any of the accepted modes of getting bread and butter which a young man must adopt who means to live and get on with other men. He was full of disgusts, and repulsions, and dislikes; everything in life wounded and made him sore; he could or would do nothing reasonably or rationally with human beings, and, to deaden the sense of pain in existence, took to the use of opiates, which left him a miserable wreck on his sister's hands, the father being dead.

Thus far the reader has the history of this family, and intimations of the younger and more beautiful one whose after fate was yet to be connected with ours.

Miss Mehitable Rossiter has always been to me a curious study. Singularly plain as she was in person, old, withered, and poor, she yet commanded respect, and even reverence, through the whole of a wide circle of acquaintance; for she was well known to some of the most considerable families in Boston, with whom, by her mother's side, she was connected. The interest in her was somewhat like that in old lace, old china, and old cashmere shawls; which, though often excessively uncomely, and looking in the eyes of un-

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interested people like mere rubbish, are held by connoisseurs to be beyond all price.

Miss Mehitable herself had great pride of character, in the sense in which pride is an innocent weakness, if not a species of virtue. She had an innate sense that she belonged to a good family, — a perfectly quiet conviction that she was a Bradford by her mother's side, and a Rossiter by her father's side, come what might in this world. She was too well versed in the duties of good blood not to be always polite and considerate to the last degree to all well-meaning common people, for she felt the *noblesse oblige* as much as if she had been a duchess. And, for that matter, in the circles of Oldtown everything that Miss Mehitable did and said had a certain weight, quite apart from that of her really fine mental powers. It was the weight of past generations, of the whole Colony of Massachusetts; all the sermons of five generations of ministers were in it, which to a God-fearing community is a great deal.

But in her quaint, uncomely body was lodged, not only a most active and even masculine mind, but a heart capable of those passionate extremes of devotion which belong to the purely feminine side of woman. She was capable of a romantic excess of affection, of an extravagance of hero-worship, which, had she been personally beautiful, might perhaps have made her the heroine of some poem of the heart. It was among the quietly accepted sorrows of her life, that for her no such romance was possible.

Men always admired her as they admired other men, and talked to her as they talked with each other. Many, during the course of her life, had formed friendships with her, which were mere relations of comradeship, but which never touched the inner sphere of the heart. That heart, so warm, so tender, and so true, she kept, with a sort of conscious shame, hidden far behind the intrenchments of her intellect. With an instinctive fear of ridicule, she scarcely

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ever spoke a tender word, and generally veiled a soft emotion under some quaint phrase of drollery. She seemed forever to feel the strange contrast between the burning, romantic heart and the dry and withered exterior.

Like many other women who have borne the curse of marked plainness, Miss Mehitable put an extravagant valuation on personal beauty. Her younger sister, whose loveliness was uncommon, was a sort of petted idol to her, during all her childish years. At the time of her father's death, she would gladly have retained her with her, but, like many other women who are strong on the intellectual side of their nature, Miss Mehitable had a sort of weakness and helplessness in relation to mere material matters, which rendered her, in the eyes of the family, unfit to be trusted with the bringing up of a bright and willful child. In fact, as regarded all the details of daily life, Miss Mehitable was the servant of Polly, who had united the offices of servant-of-all-work, housekeeper, nurse, and general factotum in old Parson Rossiter's family, and between whom and the little willful Emily grievous quarrels had often arisen. For all these reasons, and because Mrs. Farnsworth of the neighboring town of Adams was the only sister of the child's mother, was herself childless, and in prosperous worldly circumstances, it would have been deemed a flying in the face of Providence to refuse her, when she declared her intention of adopting her sister's child as her own.

Of what came of this adoption I shall have occasion to speak hereafter.

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CHAPTER XX

MISS ASPHYXIA GOES IN PURSUIT, AND MY GRANDMOTHER GIVES HER VIEWS ON EDUCATION

When Miss Asphyxia Smith found that both children really had disappeared from Needmore so completely that no trace of them remained, to do her justice, she felt some solicitude to know what had become of them. There had not been wanting instances in those early days, when so large a part of Massachusetts was unbroken forest, of children who had wandered away into the woods and starved to death; and Miss Asphyxia was by no means an ill-wisher to any child, nor so utterly without bowels as to contemplate such a possibility without some anxiety.

Not that she in the least doubted the wisdom and perfect propriety of her own mode of administration, which she had full faith would in the end have made a "smart girl" of her little charge. "That 'ere little limb didn't know what was good for herself," she said to Sol, over their evening meal of cold potatoes and boiled beef.

Sol looked round-eyed and stupid, and squared his shoulders, as he always did when this topic was introduced. He suggested, "You don't s'pose they could 'a' wandered off to the maountains where Bijah Peters' boy got lost?"

There was a sly satisfaction in observing the anxious, brooding expression which settled down over Miss Asphyxia's dusky features at the suggestion.

"When they found that 'ere boy," continued Sol, "he was all worn to skin and bone; he 'd kep' himself a week on berries and ches'nuts and sich, but a boy can't be kep' on what a squirrel can."

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"Well," said Miss Asphyxia, "I know one thing; it ain't my fault if they do starve to death. Silly critters, they was; well provided for, good home, good clothes, plenty and plenty to eat. I 'm sure you can bear witness ef I ever stinted that 'ere child in her victuals."

"I 'll bear you out on that 'ere," said Sol.

"And well you may; I 'd scorn not to give any one in my house a good bellyful," quoth Miss Asphyxia.

"That 's true enough," said Sol; "everybody 'll know that."

"Well, it 's jest total depravity," said Miss Asphyxia. "How can any one help bein' convinced o' that, that has anything to do with young uns?"

But the subject preyed upon the severe virgin's mind; and she so often mentioned it, with that roughening of her scrubby eyebrows which betokened care, that Sol's unctuous good-nature was somewhat moved, and he dropped at last a hint of having fallen on a trace of the children. He might as well have put the tips of his fingers into a rolling-mill. Miss Asphyxia was so wide-awake and resolute about anything that she wanted to know, that Sol at last was obliged to finish with informing her that he had heard of the children as having been taken in at Deacon Badger's, over in Oldtown. Sol internally chuckled, as he gave the information, when he saw how immediately Miss Asphyxia bristled with wrath. Even the best of human beings have felt that transient flash when anxiety for the fate of a child supposed to be in fatal danger gives place to unrestrained vexation at the little culprit who has given such a fright.

"Well, I shall jest tackle up and go over and bring them children home agin, at least the girl. Brother, he says he don't want the boy; he wa'n't nothin' but a plague; but I 'm one o' them persons that when I undertake a thing I mean to go through with it. Now I undertook to raise that 'ere girl, and I mean to. She need n't think she 's

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goin' to come round me with any o' her shines, going over to Deacon Badger's with lying stories about me. Mis' Deacon Badger need n't think she 's goin' to hold up her head over me, if she is a deacon's wife and I ain't a perfessor of religion. I guess I could be a perfessor if I chose to do as some folks do. That 's what I told Mis' Deacon Badger once when she asked me why I did n't jine the church. 'Mis' Badger,' says I, 'perfessin' ain't possessin', and I 'd ruther stand outside the church than go on as some people do inside on 't.'"

Therefore it was that a day or two after, when Miss Mehitable was making a quiet call at my grandmother's, and the party, consisting of my grandmother, Aunt Lois, and Aunt Keziah, were peacefully rattling their knitting-needles, while Tina was playing by the river-side, the child's senses were suddenly paralyzed by the sight of Miss Asphyxia driving with a strong arm over the bridge near my grandmother's.

In a moment the little one's heart was in her throat. She had such an awful faith in Miss Asphyxia's power to carry through anything she undertook, that all her courage withered at once at sight of her. She ran in at the back door, perfectly pale with fright, and seized hold imploringly of Miss Mehitable's gown.

"Oh, she 's coming! she 's coming after me. Don't let her get me!" she exclaimed.

"What 's the matter now?" said my grandmother. "What ails the child?"

Miss Mehitable lifted her in her lap, and began a soothing course of inquiry; but the child clung to her, only reiterating, "Don't let her have me! she is dreadful! don't!"

"As true as you live, mother," said Aunt Lois, who had tripped to the window, "there 's Miss Asphyxia Smith hitching her horse at our picket fence."

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"She is?" said my grandmother, squaring her shoulders, and setting herself in fine martial order. "Well, let her come in; she 's welcome, I 'm sure. I 'd like to talk to that woman! It 's a free country, and everybody 's got to speak their minds," — and my grandmother rattled her needles with great energy.

In a moment more Miss Asphyxia entered. She was arrayed in her best Sunday clothes, and made the neighborly salutations with an air of grim composure. There was silence, and a sense of something brooding in the air, as there often is before the outburst of a storm.

Finally, Miss Asphyxia opened the trenches. "I come over, Mis' Badger, to see about a gal o' mine that has run away." Here her eye rested severely on Tina.

"Run away!" quoth my grandmother briskly; "and good reason she should run away; all I wonder at is that you have the face to come to a Christian family after her, — that 's all. Well, she is provided for, and you 've no call to be inquiring anything about her. So I advise you to go home, and attend to your own affairs, and leave children to folks that know how to manage them better than you do."

"I expected this, Mis' Badger," said Miss Asphyxia, in a towering wrath, "but I 'd have you to know that I ain't a person that 's going to take sa'ace from no one. No deacon nor deacon's wife, nor perfessor of religion, 's a-goin' to turn up their noses at me! I can hold up my head with any on 'em, and I think your religion might teach you better than takin' up stories agin your neighbors, as a little lyin', artful hussy 'll tell." Here there was a severe glance at Miss Tina, who quailed before it, and clung to Miss Mehitable's gown. "Yes, indeed, you may hide your head," she continued, "but you can't git away from the truth; not when I 'm round to bring you out. Yes, Mis' Badger, I defy her to say I hain't done well by

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her, if she says the truth; for I say it now, this blessed minute, and would say it on my dyin' bed, and you can ask Sol ef that 'ere child hain't had everything pervided for her that a child could want, — a good clean bed and plenty o' bedclothes, and good whole clothes to wear, and her belly full o' good victuals every day; an' me a-teachin' and a-trainin' on her, enough to wear the very life out o' me, — for I always hated young uns, and this ere 's a perfect little limb as I ever did see. Why, what did she think I was a-goin' to do for her? I did n't make a lady on her; to be sure I did n't: I was a-fetchin' on her up to work for her livin' as I was fetched up. I had n't nothin' more'n she; an' just look at me now; there ain't many folks that can turn off as much work in a day as I can, though I say it that should n't. And I 've got as pretty a piece of property, and as well seen to, as most any round; and all I 've got — house and lands — is my own arnin's, honest, so there! There 's folks, I s'pose, that thinks they can afford to keep tavern for all sorts of stragglers and runaways, Injun and white. I never was one o' them sort of folks, an' I should jest like to know ef those folks is able, — that 's all. I guess if 'counts was added up, my 'counts would square up better'n their'n."

Here Miss Asphyxia elevated her nose and sniffed over my grandmother's cap-border in a very contemptuous manner, and the cap-border bristled defiantly, but undismayed, back again.

"Come now, Mis' Badger, have it out; I ain't afraid of you! I 'd just like to have you tell me what I could ha' done more nor better for this child."

"Done!" quoth my grandmother, with a pop like a roasted chestnut bursting out of the fire. "Why, you 've done what you 'd no business to. You 'd no business to take a child at all; you have n't got a grain of motherliness in you. Why, look at natur', that might teach you that

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more than meat and drink and clothes is wanted for a child. Hens brood their chickens, and keep 'em warm under their wings; and cows lick their calves and cosset 'em, and it 's a mean shame that folks will take 'em away from them. There 's our old cat will lie an hour on the kitchen floor and let her kittens lug and pull at her, atween sleeping and waking, just to keep 'em warm and comfortable, you know. 'T ain't just feedin' and clothin' back and belly that 's all; it 's *broodin'* that young creeturs wants; and you hain't got a bit of broodin' in you; your heart 's as hard as the nether mill-stone. Sovereign grace may soften it some day, but nothin' else can; you 're a poor, old, hard, worldly woman, Miss Asphyxia Smith: that 's what *you* are! If Divine grace could have broken in upon you, and given you a heart to love the child, you might have brought her up, 'cause you are a smart woman, and an honest one; that nobody denies."

Here Miss Mehitable took up the conversation, surveying Miss Asphyxia with that air of curious attention with which one studies a human being entirely out of the line of one's personal experience. Miss Mehitable was, as we have shown, in every thread of her being and education an aristocrat, and had for Miss Asphyxia that polite, easy tolerance which a sense of undoubted superiority gives, united with a shrewd pleasure in the study of a new and peculiar variety of the human species.

"My good Miss Smith," she observed, in conciliatory tones, "by your own account you must have had a great deal of trouble with this child. Now I propose for the future to relieve you of it altogether. I do not think you would ever succeed in making as efficient a person as yourself of her. It strikes me," she added, with a humorous twinkle of her eye, "that there are radical differences of nature, which would prevent her growing up like yourself. I don't doubt you conscientiously intended to do your duty

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by her, and I beg you to believe that you need have no further trouble with her."

"Goodness gracious knows," said Miss Asphyxia, "the child ain't much to fight over, — she was nothin' but a plague; and I 'd rather have done all she did any day, than to 'a' had her round under my feet. I hate young uns, anyway."

"Then why, my good woman, do you object to parting with her?"

"Who said I did object? I don't care nothin' about parting with her; all is, when I begin a thing I like to go through with it."

"But if it is n't worth going through with," said Miss Mehitable, "it 's as well to leave it, is it not?"

"And I 'd got her clothes made, — not that they 're worth so very much, but then they 're worth just what they *are* worth, anyway," said Miss Asphyxia.

Here Tina made a sudden impulsive dart from Miss Mehitable's lap, and ran out of the back door, and over to her new home, and up into the closet of the chamber where was hanging the new suit of homespun in which Miss Asphyxia had arrayed her. She took it down and rolled the articles all together in a tight bundle, which she secured with a string, and, before the party in the kitchen had ceased wondering at her flight, suddenly reappeared, with flushed cheeks and dilated eyes, and tossed the bundle into Miss Asphyxia's lap. "There 's every bit you ever gave me," she said; "I don't want to keep a single thing."

"My dear, is that a proper way to speak?" said Miss Mehitable reprovingly; but Tina saw my grandmother's broad shoulders joggling with a secret laugh, and discerned twinkling lines in the reproving gravity which Miss Mehitable tried to assume. She felt pretty sure of her ground by this time.

"Well, it 's no use talkin'," said Miss Asphyxia, rising.

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"If folks think they 're able to bring up a beggar child like a lady, it 's their lookout and not mine. I was n't aware," she added, with severe irony, "that Parson Rossiter left so much of an estate that you could afford to bring up other folks' children in silks and satins."

"Our estate is n't much," said Miss Mehitable good-naturedly, "but we shall make the best of it."

"Well, now, you just mark my words, Miss Rossiter," said Miss Asphyxia, "that 'ere child will never grow up a smart woman with your bringin' up; she 'll jest run right over you, and you 'll let her have her head in everything. I see jest how 't 'll be; I don't want nobody to tell me."

"I dare say you are quite right, Miss Smith," said Miss Mehitable; "I have n't the slightest opinion of my own powers in that line; but she may be happy with me, for all that."

"Happy?" repeated Miss Asphyxia, with an odd intonation, as if she were repeating a sound of something imperfectly comprehended, and altogether out of her line. "Oh, well, if folks is goin' to begin to talk about that, I hain't got time; it don't seem to me that that 's what this 'ere world 's for."

"What is it for, then?" said Miss Mehitable, who felt an odd sort of interest in the human specimen before her.

"Meant for? Why, for hard work, I s'pose; that 's all I ever found it for. Talk about coddling! it 's little we get o' that, the way the Lord fixes things in this world, dear knows. He 's pretty up and down with us, by all they tell us. You must take things right off, when they 're goin'. Ef you don't, so much the worse for you; they won't wait for you. Lose an hour in the morning, and you may chase it till ye drop down, you never 'll catch it! That 's the way things goes, and I should like to know who 's a-going to stop to quiddle with young uns? 'T ain't me, that 's certain; so, as there 's no more to be made by

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this 'ere talk, I may 's well be goin'. You 're welcome to the young un, ef you say so; I jest wanted you to know that what I begun I 'd 'a' gone through with, ef you had n't stepped in; and I did n't want no reflections on my good name, neither, for I had my ideas of what 's right, and can have 'em yet, I s'pose, if Mis' Badger does think I 've got a heart of stone. I should like to know how I 'm to have any other when I ain't elected, and I don't see as I am, or likely to be, and I don't see neither why I ain't full as good as a good many that be."

"Well, well, Miss Smith," said Miss Mehitable, "we can't any of us enter into those mysteries, but I respect your motives, and would be happy to see you any time you will call, and I 'm in hopes to teach this little girl to treat you properly," she said, taking the child's hand.

"Likely story," said Miss Asphxyia, with a short, hard laugh. "She 'll get ahead o' you, you 'll see that: but I don't hold malice, so good morning," — and Miss Asphyxia suddenly and promptly departed, and was soon seen driving away at a violent pace.

"Upon my word, that woman is n't so bad, now," said Miss Mehitable, looking after her, while she leisurely inhaled a pinch of snuff.

"Oh, I 'm so glad you did n't let her have me!" said Tina.

"To think of a creature so dry and dreary, so devoid even of the conception of enjoyment in life," said Miss Mehitable, "hurrying through life without a moment's rest, — without even the capacity of resting if she could, — and all for what?"

"For my part, mother, I think you were down too hard on her," said Aunt Lois.

"Not a bit," said my grandmother cheerily. "Such folks ought to be talked to; it may set her to thinking, and do her good. I 've had it on my heart to give that woman a piece of my mind ever since the children came

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here. Come here, my poor little dear," said she to Tina, with one of her impulsive outgushes of motherliness. "I know you must be hungry by this time; come into the buttery, and see what I 've got for you."

Now there was an indiscreet championship of Miss Tina, a backing of her in her treatment of Miss Asphyxia, in this overflow, which Aunt Lois severely disapproved, and which struck Miss Mehitable as not being the very best thing to enforce her own teachings of decorum and propriety.

The small young lady tilted into the buttery after my grandmother, with the flushed cheeks and triumphant air of a victor, and they heard her little tongue running with the full assurance of having a sympathetic listener.

"Now mother will spoil that child, if you let her," said Aunt Lois. "She 's the greatest hand to spoil children; she always lets 'em have what they ask for. I expect Susy's boys 'll be raising Cain round the house; they would if it was n't for me. They have only to follow mother into that buttery, and out they come with great slices of bread and butter, any time of day, — yes, and even sugar on it, if you 'll believe me."

"And does 'em good, too," said my grandmother, who reappeared from the buttery, with Miss Tina tilting and dancing before her, with a confirmatory slice of bread and butter and sugar in her hand. "Tastes good, don't it, dear?" said she, giving the child a jovial chuck under her little chin.

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Tina; "I 'd like to have old nasty Sphyxy see me now."

"Tut, tut! my dear," said grandmother; "good little girls don't call names;" — but at the same time the venerable gentlewoman nodded and winked in the most open manner across the curly head at Miss Mehitable, and her portly shoulders shook with laughter, so that the young culprit was not in the least abashed at the reproof.

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"Mother, I do wonder at you!" said Aunt Lois indignantly.

"Never you mind, Lois; I guess I've brought up more children than ever you did," said my grandmother cheerily. "There, my little dear," she added, "you may run down to your play now, and never fear that anybody's going to get you."

Miss Tina, upon this hint, gladly ran off to finish an architectural structure of pebbles by the river, which she was busy in building at the time when the awful vision of Miss Asphyxia appeared; and my grandmother returned to her buttery to attend to a few matters which had been left unfinished in the morning's work.

"It is a very serious responsibility," said Miss Mehitable, when she had knit awhile in silence, "at my time of life, to charge one's self with the education of a child. One treats one's self to a child as one buys a picture or a flower, but the child will not remain a picture or a flower, and then comes the awful question, what it may grow to be, and what share you may have in determining its future."

"Well, old Parson Moore used to preach the best sermons on family government that ever I heard," said Aunt Lois. "He said you must begin in the very beginning and break a child's will, — short off, — nothing to be done without that. I remember he whipped little Titus, his first son, off and on, nearly a whole day, to make him pick up a pocket-handkerchief."

Here the edifying conversation was interrupted by a loud explosive expletive from the buttery, which showed that my grandmother was listening with anything but approbation.

"FIDDLESTICKS!" quoth she.

"And did he succeed in entirely subduing the child's will in that one effort?" said Miss Mehitable musingly.

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"Well, no. Mrs. Moore told me he had to have twenty or thirty just such spells before he brought him under; but he persevered, and he broke his will at last, — at least so far that he always minded when his father was round."

"FIDDLESTICKS!" quoth my grandmother, in a yet louder and more explosive tone.

"Mrs. Badger does not appear to sympathize with your views," said Miss Mehitable.

"Oh, mother? Of course she don't; she has her own ways and doings, and she won't hear to reason," said Aunt Lois.

"Come, come, Lois; I never knew an old maid who did n't think she knew just how to bring up children," said my grandmother. "Wish you could have tried yourself with that sort of doxy when you was little. Guess if I 'd broke your will, I should ha' had to break you for good an' all, for your will is about all there is of you! But I tell you, I had too much to do to spend a whole forenoon making you pick up a pocket-handkerchief. When you did n't mind, I hit you a good clip, and picked it up myself; and when you would n't go where I wanted you, I picked you up, neck and crop, and put you there. That was my government. I let your will take care of itself. I thought the Lord had given you a pretty strong one, and he knew what 't was for, and could take care of it in his own time, which hain't come yet, as I see."

Now this last was one of those personal thrusts with which dear family friends are apt to give arguments a practical application; and Aunt Lois's spare, thin cheeks flushed up as she said, in an aggrieved tone: "Well, I s'pose I 'm dreadful, of course. Mother always contrives to turn round on me."

"Well, Lois, I hate to hear folks talk nonsense," said my grandmother, who by this time had got a pot of cream under her arm, which she was stirring with the pudding-

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stick; and this afforded her an opportunity for emphasizing her sentences with occasional dumps of the same.

"People don't need to talk to me," she said, "about Parson Moore's government. Tite Moore was n't any great shakes, after all the row they made about him. He was well enough while his father was round, but about the worst boy that ever I saw when his eye was off from him. Good or bad, my children was about the same behind my back that they were before my face anyway."

"Well, now, there was Aunt Sally Morse," said Aunt Lois, steadily ignoring the point of my grandmother's discourse. "There was a woman that brought up children exactly to suit me. Everything went like clock-work with her babies; they were nursed just so often, and no more; they were put down to sleep at just such a time, and nobody was allowed to rock 'em, or sing to 'em, or fuss with 'em. If they cried, she just whipped them till they stopped; and when they began to toddle about, she never put things out of their reach, but just slapped their hands whenever they touched them, till they learnt to let things alone."

"Slapped their hands!" quoth my grandmother, "and learnt them to let things alone! I 'd like to ha' seen that tried on my children. Sally had a set of white, still children, that were all just like dipped candles by natur', and she laid it all to her management; and look at 'em now they 're grown up. They 're decent, respectable folks, but noways better than other folks' children. Lucinda Morse ain't a bit better than you are, Lois, if she was whipped and made to lie still when she was a baby, and you were taken up and rocked when you cried. All is, they had hard times when they were little, and cried themselves to sleep nights, and were hectored and worried when they ought to have been taking some comfort. Ain't the world hard enough, without fighting babies, I want to know? I

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hate to see a woman that don't want to rock her own baby, and is contriving ways all the time to shirk the care of it. Why, if all the world was that way, there would be no sense in Scriptur'. 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you,' the Bible says, taking for granted that mothers were made to comfort children and give them good times when they are little. Sally Morse was always talking about her system. She thought she did wonders, 'cause she got so much time to piece bedquilts, and work counterpanes, and make pickles, by turning off her children; but I took my comfort in mine, and let them have their comfort as they went along. It 's about all the comfort there is in this world, anyway, and they 're none the worse for it now, as I see."

"Well, in all these cases there is a medium, if we could hit it," said Miss Mehitable. "There must be authority over these ignorant, helpless little folks in early years, to keep them from ruining themselves."

"Oh, yes. Of course there must be government," said my grandmother. "I always made my children mind me; but I would n't pick quarrels with 'em, nor keep up long fights to break their will; if they did n't mind, I came down on 'em and had it over with at once, and then was done with 'em. They turned out pretty fair, too," said my grandmother complacently, giving an emphatic thump with her pudding-stick.

"I was reading Mr. John Locke's treatise on education yesterday," said Miss Mehitable. "It strikes me there are many good ideas in it."

"Well, one live child puts all your treatises to rout," said my grandmother. "There ain't any two children alike; and what works with one won't with another. Folks have just got to open their eyes, and look and see what the Lord meant when he put the child together, if they can, and not stand in his way; and after all we must

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wait for sovereign grace to finish the work: if the Lord don't keep the house, the watchman waketh but in vain. Children are the heritage of the Lord, — that 's all you can make of it."

My grandmother, like other warm-tempered, impulsive, dictatorial people, had formed her theories of life to suit her own style of practice. She was, to be sure, autocratic in her own realm, and we youngsters knew that, at certain times when her blood was up, it was but a word and a blow for us, and that the blow was quite likely to come first and the word afterward; but the temporary severities of kindly-natured, generous people never lessen the affection of children or servants, any more than the too hot rays of the benignant sun, or the too driving patter of the needful rain. When my grandmother detected us in a childish piece of mischief, and soundly cuffed our ears, or administered summary justice with immediate polts of her rheumatic crutch, we never felt the least rising of wrath or rebellion, but only made off as fast as possible, generally convinced that the good woman was in the right of it, and that we got no more than we deserved.

I remember one occasion when Bill had been engaged in making some dressed chickens dance, which she had left trussed up with the liver and lights duly washed and replaced within them. Bill set them up on their pins, and put them through active gymnastics, in course of which these interior treasures were rapidly scattered out upon the table. A howl of indignation from grandmother announced coming wrath, and Bill darted out of the back door, while I was summarily seized and chastised.

"Grandmother, grandmother! *I* did n't do it, — it was Bill."

"Well, but I can't catch Bill, you see," said my venerable monitor, continuing the infliction.

"But I did n't do it."

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"Well, let it stand for something you did do, then," quoth my grandmother, by this time quite pacified: "you do bad things enough that you ain't whipped for, any day."

The whole resulted in a large triangle of pumpkin pie, administered with the cordial warmth of returning friendship, and thus the matter was happily adjusted. Even the prodigal son Bill, when, returning piteously, and standing penitent under the milk-room window, he put in a submissive plea, "Please, grandmother, I won't do so any more," was allowed a peaceable slice of the same comfortable portion, and bid to go in peace.

I remember another funny instance of my grandmother's discipline. It was when I was a little fellow, seated in the chimney-corner at my grandfather's side. I had discovered a rising at the end of my shoe-sole, which showed that it was beginning to come off. It struck me as a funny thing to do to tear up the whole sole, which piece of mischief my grandfather perceiving, he raised his hand to chastise.

"Come here, Horace, quick!" said my grandmother imperatively, that she might save me from the impending blow.

I lingered, whereat she made a dart at me, and seized me. Just as my grandfather boxed my ear on one side, she hit me a similar cuff on the other.

"Why did n't you come when I called you?" she said; "now you 've got your ears boxed both sides."

Somewhat bewildered, I retreated under her gown in disgrace, but I was after a relenting moment lifted into her lap, and allowed to go to sleep upon her ample bosom.

"Mother, why don't you send that boy to bed nights?" said Aunt Lois. "You never have any regular rules about anything."

"Law, he likes to sit up and see the fire as well as any

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of us, Lois; and do let him have all the comfort he can as he goes along, poor boy! there ain't any too much in this world, anyway."

"Well, for my part, I think there ought to be system in bringing up children," said Aunt Lois.

"Wait till you get 'em of your own, and then try it, Lois," said my grandmother, laughing with a rich, comfortable laugh, which rocked my little sleepy head up and down, as I drowsily opened my eyes with a delicious sense of warmth and security.

From all these specimens it is to be inferred that the theorists on education will find no improvement in the contemplation of my grandmother's methods, and will pronounce her a pig-headed, passionate, impulsive, soft-hearted body, as entirely below the notice of a rational, inquiring mind as an old brooding hen, which model of maternity in many respects she resembled. It may be so, but the longer I live, the more faith I have in grandmothers and grandmotherly logic, of which, at some future time, I shall give my views at large.

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CHAPTER XXI

WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH THE BOY?

"WELL," said my Aunt Lois, as she gave the last sweep to the hearth, after she had finished washing up the supper-dishes; "I've been up to Ebal Scran's store this afternoon, to see about soling Horace's Sunday shoes. Ebal will do 'em as reasonable as any one; and he spoke to me to know whether I knew of any boy that a good family would like to bind out to him for an apprentice, and I told him I'd speak to you about Horace. It'll be time pretty soon to think of putting him at something."

Among the many unexplained and inexplicable woes of childhood, are its bitter antagonisms, so perfectly powerless, yet often so very decided, against certain of the grown people who control it. Perhaps some of us may remember respectable, well-meaning people, with whom in our mature years we live in perfect amity, but who in our childhood appeared to us bitter enemies. Children are remarkably helpless in this respect, because they cannot choose their company and surroundings as grown people can; and are sometimes entirely in the power of those with whom their natures are so unsympathetic that they may be almost said to have a constitutional aversion to them. Aunt Lois was such a one to me, principally because of her forecasting, untiring, pertinacious, care-taking propensities. She had already looked over my lot in life, and set down in her own mind what was to be done with me, and went at it with a resolute energy that would not wait for the slow development of circumstances.

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That I should want to study, as my father did, — that I should for this cause hang as an unpractical, unproductive, dead weight on the family, — was the evil which she saw in prospective, against which my grandfather's placid, easy temper, and my grandmother's impulsive bountifulness, gave her no security. A student in the family, and a son in college, she felt to be luxuries to which a poor widow in dependent circumstances had no right to look forward, and therefore she opened the subject betimes, with prompt energy, by the proposition above stated.

My mother, who sat on the other side of the fireplace, looked at me with a fluttering look of apprehension. I flushed up in a sort of rage that somehow Aunt Lois always succeeded in putting me into. "I don't want to be a shoemaker, and I won't neither," I said.

"Tut, tut," said my grandfather placidly, from his corner; "we don't let little boys say 'won't' here."

I now burst out crying, and ran to my grandmother, sobbing as if my heart would break.

"Lois, can't you let this boy alone?" said my grandmother vengefully; "I do wonder at you. Poor little fellow! his father ain't quite cold in his grave yet, and you want to pitch him out into the world," — and my grandmother seized me in her strong arms, and lulled me against her ample bosom. "There, poor boy, don't you cry; you sha'n't, no, you sha'n't; you shall stay and help grandma, so you shall."

"Great help he is," said Aunt Lois contemptuously; "gets a book in his hand and goes round with his head in a bag; never gives a message right, and is always stumbling over things that are right in his way. There's Harry, now, is as handy as a girl, and if he says he 'll do a thing, I know 't 'll be done," — and Aunt Lois illustrated her doctrine by calling up Harry, and making him stretch forth his arms for a skein of blue-mixed yarn which

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she was going to wind. The firelight shone full on his golden curls and clear blue eyes, as he stood obediently and carefully yielding to Aunt Lois's quick, positive movements. As she wound, and twitched, and pulled, with certainly twice the energy that the work in hand required, his eyes followed her motions with a sort of quiet drollery; there was a still, inward laugh in them, as if she amused him greatly.

Such open comparisons between two boys might have gone far to destroy incipient friendship; but Harry seemed to be in a wonderful degree gifted with the faculties that made him a universal favorite. All the elders of the family liked him, because he was quiet and obedient, always doing with cheerful promptness exactly what he was bidden, unless, as sometimes happened in our family circle, he was bidden to do two or three different things at one and the same time, when he would stand looking innocently puzzled, till my grandmother and Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah had settled it among them whose was to be the ruling will. He was deft and neat-handed as a girl about any little offices of a domestic nature; he was thoughtful and exact in doing errands; he was delicately clean and neat in his personal habits; he never tracked Aunt Lois's newly scoured floor with the traces of unwiped shoes; he never left shavings and litter on a cleanly swept hearth, or tumbled and deranged anything, so that he might safely be trusted on errands even to the most sacred precincts of a housekeeper's dominions. What boy with all these virtues is not held a saint by all women-folk? Yet, though he was frequently commended in all those respects, to my marked discredit, Harry was to me a sort of necessary of life. There was something in his nature that was wanting to mine, and I attached myself to him with a pertinacity which had never before marked my intercourse with any boy.

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A day or two after the arrival of the children, the minister and Lady Lothrop had called on my grandmother in all the dignity of their station, and taken an approving view of the boy. Lady Lothrop had engaged to take him under her care, and provide a yearly sum for his clothing and education. She had never had a child of her own, and felt that diffidence about taking the entire charge of a boy which would be natural to a person of fastidious and quiet habits, and she therefore signified that it would be more agreeable to her if my grandmother would allow him to make one of her own family circle, — a proposal to which she cheerfully assented, saying, that "one more chick makes little difference to an old hen."

I immediately petitioned that I might have Harry for a bedfellow, and he and I were allowed a small bedroom to ourselves at the head of the back stairs. It was a rude little crib, roughly fenced off from the passage-way by unplaned boards of different heights. A pine table, two stools, a small trundle-bed, and a rude case of drawers, were all its furniture. Harry's love of order was strikingly manifest in the care which he took of this little apartment. His few articles of clothing and personal belongings all had their exact place, and always were bestowed there with scrupulous regularity. He would adjust the furniture, straighten the bed-clothing, and quietly place and replace the things that I in my fitful, nervous eagerness was always disarranging; and when, as often happened in one of my spasms of enthusiasm, I turned everything in the room topsy-turvy, searching for something I had lost, or projecting some new arrangement, he would wait peaceably till I had finished, and then noiselessly get everything back again into its former order. He never quarreled with me, or thwarted me in my turbulent or impatient moods, but seemed to wait for me to get through whatever I was doing, when he would come in and silently rearrange. He was,

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on the whole, a singularly silent child, but with the kind of silence which gives a sense of companionship. It was evident that he was always intensely observant and interested in whatever was going on before him, and ready at any moment to take a friendly part when he was wanted; but for the most part his place in the world seemed that of an amused listener and observer. Life seemed to present itself to him as a curious spectacle, and he was never tired of looking and listening, watching the ways and words of all our family circle, and often smiling to himself as if they afforded him great diversion. Aunt Lois, with her quick, sharp movements, her determined, outspoken ways, seemed to amuse him as much as she irritated me, and I would sometimes see him turn away with a droll smile when he had been watching one of her emphatic courses round the room. He had a certain tact in avoiding all the sharp corners and angles of her character, which, in connection with his handiness and his orderly ways, caused him at last to become a prime favorite with her. With his quiet serviceableness and manual dexterity, he seemed to be always the one that was exactly wanting to do an odd turn, so that at last he came to be depended on for many little inferior offices, which he rendered with a good will none the less cheerful because of his silence.

"There 's time enough to think about what Horace is to do another year," said my grandfather, having reflected some moments after the passage of arms between my grandmother and Aunt Lois. "He 's got to have some schooling. The boys had both better go to school for this winter, and then we 'll see what next."

"Well, I just mentioned about Ebal Scran, because he 's a good man to take a boy, and he wants one now. If we don't take that chance, it may not come again."

"Wal, Miss Lois," said Sam Lawson, who had sat silent in a dark corner of the chimney, "ef I was to say about

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Horace, I 'd say he 'd do better for somethin' else 'n shoemakin'. He 's the most amazin' little fellow to read I ever see. As much as a year ago Jake Marshall and me and the other fellers round to the store used to like to get him to read the Columbian Sentinel to us; he did it off slicker than any on us could, he did, — there wa'n't no kind o' word could stop him. I should say such a boy as that ought to have a liberal education."

"And who 's going to pay for it?" said Aunt Lois, turning round on him sharply. "I suppose you know it costs something to get a man through college. We never can afford to send him to college. It 's all we can do to bring his Uncle Bill through."

"Well, well," said my grandmother, "there 's no use worrying the child, one way or the other."

"They can both go to district school this winter," said my grandfather.

"Well," said Aunt Lois, "the other day I found him down in a corner humping his back out over a Latin grammar that I 'd put away with all the rest of his father's books on the back side of the upper shelf in our closet, and I took it away from him. If he was going to college, why, it 's well enough to study for it; but if he is n't we don't want him idlin' round with scraps of Latin in his head like old Jock Twitchel, — got just Latin enough to make a fool of his English, and he 's neither one thing nor another."

"I do wonder, Lois, what there is under the sun that you don't feel called to see to," said my grandmother. "What do you want to quarrel with the child for? He shall have his Latin grammar if he wants it, and any of the rest of his father's books, poor child. I s'pose he likes 'em because they were his poor father's."

I leaped for joy in my grandmother's lap, for my father's precious books had been in a state of blockade ever since

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we had been in the house, and it was only by putting a chair on a table one day, when Aunt Lois and my mother were out, that I had managed to help myself to the Latin grammar, out of which my father had begun to teach me before he died.

"Well, well," said Aunt Lois, "at any rate it 's eight o'clock, and time these boys went to bed."

Upon this hint Harry and I went to our little bedroom without the ceremony of a candle. It was a frosty autumn night, but a good, clear square of moonlight lay on the floor.

Now Harry, in common with many other very quiet-natured people, was remarkable for a peculiar persistency in all his ways and manners. Ever since I had roomed with him, I had noticed with a kind of silent wonder the regularity of his nightly devotional exercises, to which he always addressed himself before he went to bed, with an appearance of simple and absorbed fervor, kneeling down by the bed, and speaking in a low, earnest tone of voice, never seeming to hurry or to abbreviate, as I was always inclined to do whenever I attempted similar performances. In fact, as usually I said no prayers at all, there was often an awkward pause and stillness on my part, while I watched and waited for Harry to be through with his devotions, so that I might resume the thread of worldly conversation.

Now to me the perseverance with which he performed these nightly exercises was unaccountable. The doctrines which in that day had been gaining ground in New England, with regard to the utter inutility and unacceptableness of any prayers or religious doings of the unregenerate, had borne their legitimate fruits in causing parents to become less and less particular in cultivating early habits of devotion in children; and so, when I had a room to myself, my mother had ceased to take any oversight of my religious

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exercises; and as I had overheard my Aunt Lois maintaining very stringently that there was no use in it so long as my heart was not changed, I very soon dropped the form. So, when night after night I noticed Harry going on with his devotions, it seemed to me, from my more worldly point of view, that he gave himself a great deal of unnecessary trouble, particularly if, after all, his prayers did no good. I thought I would speak with him about it, and accordingly this night I said to him, "Harry, do you think it does any good to say your prayers?"

"To be sure I do," he said.

"But if your heart has n't been changed, your prayer is an abomination to the Lord. Aunt Lois says so," I said, repeating a Scriptural form I had often heard quoted.

Harry turned over, and in the fading daylight I saw his eyes, large, clear, and tranquil. There was not the shadow of a cloud in them. "I don't know anything about that," he said quietly. "You see I don't believe that sort of talk. God is our Father; he loves us. If we want things, and ask him for them, he will give them to us if it is best; mother always told me so, and I find it is so. I promised her always to say these prayers, and to believe that God loves us. I always shall."

"Do you really think so, Harry?" I said.

"Why, yes; to be sure I do."

"I mean, do you ever ask God for things you want? I don't mean saying prayers, but asking for anything."

"Of course I do. I always have, and he gives them to me. He always has taken care of me, and he always will."

"Now, Harry," said I, "I want to go to college, and Aunt Lois says there is n't any money to send me there. She wants mother to bind me out to a shoemaker; and I 'd rather die than do that. I love to study, and I mean to learn. Now do you suppose, if I ask God, he will help me?"

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"Certainly he will," said Harry, with an incredible firmness and quietness of manner. "Just you try it."

"Don't you want to study and go to college?" said I.

"Certainly I do. I ask God every night that I may, if it is best," he said with simplicity.

"It will be a great deal harder for you than for me," I said, "because you have n't any relations."

"Yes, but God can do anything he pleases," said Harry, with a sort of energetic simplicity.

The confidence expressed in his manner produced a kind of effect upon me. I had urgent needs, too, — longings which I was utterly helpless ever to fulfill, — particularly that visionary desire to go to college and get an education. "Harry," I said, "you ask God that I may go to college."

"Yes, I will," he answered, — "I 'll ask every night. But then," he added, turning over and looking at me, "why don't you ask yourself, Horace?"

It was difficult for me to answer that question. I think that the differences among human beings in the natural power of faith are as great as any other constitutional diversity, and that they begin in childhood. Some are born believers, and some are born skeptics. I was one of the latter. There was an eternal query, — an habitual interrogation point to almost every proposition in my mind, even from childhood, — a habit of looking at everything from so many sides, that it was difficult to get a settled assent to anything.

Perhaps the curious kind of double life that I led confirmed this skeptical tendency. I was certain that I constantly saw and felt things, the assertion of whose existence as I saw them drew down on me stinging reproofs and radical doubts of my veracity. This led me to distrust my own perceptions on all subjects, for I was no less certain of what I saw and felt in the spiritual world than of what

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I saw and felt in the material; and, if I could be utterly mistaken in the one, I could also be in the other.

The repression and silence about this which became the habit of my life formed a covering for a constant wondering inquiry. The habit of reserve on these subjects had become so intense, that even to Harry I never spoke of it. I think I loved Harry more than I loved anything; in fact, before he came to us, I do not think I knew anything of love as a sentiment. My devotion to my father resembled the blind, instinctive worship of a dog for his master. My feeling toward my mother and grandmother was that impulse of want that induces a chicken to run to a hen in any of its little straits. It was an animal instinct, — a commerce of helplessness with help.

For Harry I felt a sort of rudimentary, poetical tenderness, like the love of man for woman. I admired his clear blue eyes, his curling golden hair, his fair, pure complexion, his refined and quiet habits, and a sort of unconsciousness of self that there was about him. His simplicity of nature was incorruptible; he seemed always to speak, without disguise, exactly what he thought, without the least apparent consideration of anything but its truth; and this gave him a strange air of innocency. A sort of quaint humor always bubbling up in little quiet looks and ways, and in harmless practical jokes, gave me a constant sense of amusement in his society.

As the reader may have observed, we were a sharp-cut and peculiar set in our house, and sometimes, when the varied scenes of family life below stairs had amused Harry more than common, he would, after we had got into our chamber by ourselves, break into a sudden flow of mimicry, — imitating now Aunt Lois's sharp, incisive movements and decided tones, or flying about like my venerated grandmother in her most confused and hurried moments, or presenting a perfect image of Uncle Fliakim's frisky

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gyrations, till he would set me into roars of laughter; when he would turn gravely round and ask what I was laughing at. He never mentioned a name, or made remarks about the persons indicated, — the sole reflection on them was the absurd truthfulness of his imitation; and when I would call out the name he would look at me with eyes brimful of mischief, but in utter silence.

Generally speaking, his language was characterized by a peculiar nicety in the selection of words, and an avoidance of clownish or vulgar phraseology, and was such as marks a child whose early years have all been passed in the intercourse of refined society; but sometimes he would absurdly introduce into his conversation scraps from Sam Lawson's vocabulary, with flashes of mimicry of his shambling gait, and the lanky droop of his hands; yet these shifting flashes of imitation were the only comment he ever made upon him.

After Harry began to share my apartment, my nightly visions became less frequent, because, perhaps, instead of lying wide-awake expecting them, I had him to talk to. Once or twice, indeed, I saw standing by him, after he had fallen asleep, that same woman whose blue eyes and golden hair I had remarked when we were lost in the forest. She looked down on him with an inexpressible tenderness, and seemed to bless him; and I used to notice that he spoke oftener of his mother the next day, and quoted her words to me with the simple, unquestioning veneration which he always showed for them.

One thing about Harry which was striking to me, and which he possessed in common with many still, retiring people, was great vigor in maintaining his individuality. It has been the experience of my life that it is your quiet people who, above all other children of men, are set in their ways and intense in their opinions. Their very reserve and silence are a fortification behind which all their

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peculiarities grow and thrive at their leisure, without encountering those blows and shocks which materially modify more outspoken natures. It is owing to the peculiar power of quietness that one sometimes sees characters fashioning themselves in a manner the least to be expected from the circumstances and associates which surround them. As a fair white lily grows up out of the bed of meadow muck, and, without note or comment, rejects all in the soil that is alien from her being, and goes on fashioning her own silver cup side by side with weeds that are drawing coarser nutriment from the soil, so we often see a refined and gentle nature by some singular internal force unfolding itself by its own laws, and confirming itself in its own beliefs, as wholly different from all that surround it as is the lily from the rag-weed. There are persons, in fact, who seem to grow almost wholly from within, and on whom the teachings, the doctrines, and the opinions of those around them produce little or no impression.

Harry was modest in his bearing; he never put forth an opinion opposed to those around him, unless a special question was asked him; but, even from early childhood, the opinion of no human being seemed to have much power to modify or alter certain convictions on which his life was based.

I remember one Sunday, our good Parson Lothrop took it into his head to preach one of those cool, philosophical sermons in which certain scholarly and rational Christians in easy worldly circumstances seem to take delight, — a sort of preaching which removes the providence of God as far off from human sympathy as it is possible to be. The amount of the matter as he stated it seemed to be, that the Creator had devised a very complicated and thorough-working machine, which he had wound up and set going ages ago, which brought out results with the undeviating accuracy of clock-work. Of course there was the declara-

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tion that "not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father," and that "the very hairs of our head are numbered," standing square across his way. But we all know that a text of Scripture is no embarrassment at all in the way of a thorough-paced theologian, when he has a favorite idea to establish.

These declarations were explained as an Oriental, metaphorical way of stating that the All-wise had started a grand world-machine on general laws which included the greatest good to the least of his creation.

I noticed that Harry sat gazing at him with clear, wide-open eyes and that fixed attention which he always gave to anything of a religious nature. The inference that I drew from it was, that Harry must be mistaken in his confidence in prayer, and that the kind of Fatherly intervention he looked for and asked for in his affairs was out of the question. As we walked home I expected him to say something about it, but he did not. When we were in our room at night, and he had finished his prayers, I said, "Harry, did you notice Dr. Lothrop's sermon?"

"Yes, I noticed it," he said.

"Well, if that is true, what good does it do to pray?"

"It is n't true," he said simply.

"How do you know it is n't?"

"Oh, I *know* better," he said.

"But, Harry, — Dr. Lothrop, you know, — why, he 's the minister," — and what could a boy of that day say more?

"He 's mistaken there, though," said Harry quietly, as he would speak of a man who denied the existence of the sun or moon. He was too positive and too settled to be in any frame to argue about it, and the whole of the discourse, which had seemed to me so damaging to his opinions, melted over him like so much moonshine. He fell asleep saying to himself, "The Lord is my shepherd, I

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shall not want," and I lay awake, wondering in my own mind whether this was the way to live, and, if it were, why my grandmother and Aunt Lois, and my father and mother, and all the good people I had ever known, had so many troubles and worries.

Ages ago, in the green, flowery hollows of the hills of Bethlehem, a young shepherd boy took this view of life, and began his days singing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," and ended them by saying, "Thou hast taught me from my youth up, and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works;" and his tender communings with an unseen Father have come down to our days as witnesses of green pastures and still waters to be found in this weary workaday world, open ever to those who are simple-hearted enough to seek them. It would seem to be the most natural thing in the world that the child of an ever-present Father should live in this way, — that weakness and ignorance, standing within call and reach of infinite grace and strength, should lay hold of that divine helpfulness, and grow to it and by it, as the vine climbs upon the rock; but yet such lives are the exception rather than the rule, even among the good. But the absolute faith of Harry's mind produced about him an atmosphere of composure and restfulness which was, perhaps, the strongest attraction that drew me to him. I was naturally nervous, sensitive, excitable, and needed the repose which he gave me. His quiet belief that all would be right had a sort of effect on me, and although I did not fall into his way of praying, I came to have great confidence in it for him, and to indulge some vague hopes that something good might come of it for me.

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CHAPTER XXII

DAILY LIVING IN OLDTOWN

HENCEFORTH my story must be a cord with three strands, inexplicably intertwisted, and appearing and disappearing in their regular intervals, as each occupies for the moment the prominent place. And this threefold cord is composed of myself, Harry, and Tina. To show how the peculiar life of old Massachusetts worked upon us, and determined our growth and character and destinies, is a theme that brings in many personages, many subjects, many accessories. It is strange that no human being grows up who does not so intertwist in his growth the whole idea and spirit of his day, that rightly to dissect out his history would require one to cut to pieces and analyze society, law, religion, the metaphysics and the morals of his times; and, as all these things run back to those of past days, the problem is still further complicated. The humblest human being is the sum total of a column of figures which go back through centuries before he was born.

Old Crab Smith and Miss Asphyxia, if their biographies were rightly written, would be found to be the result and outcome of certain moral and social forces, justly to discriminate which might puzzle a philosopher. But be not alarmed, reader; I am not going to puzzle you, but to return in the briefest time possible to my story.

Harry was adopted into our family circle early in the autumn; and, after much discussion, it was resolved in the family synod that he and I should go to the common school in the neighborhood that winter, and out of school-hours

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share between us certain family tasks, or "chores," as they were called at home.

Our daily life began at four o'clock in the morning, when the tapping of Aunt Lois's imperative heels on the back stairs, and her authoritative rap at our door, dispelled my slumbers. I was never much of a sleeper; my slumbers at best were light and cat-like; but Harry required all my help and my nervous wakefulness to get him to open his drowsy blue eyes, which he always did with the most perfectly amiable temper. He had that charming gift of physical good-humor which is often praised as a virtue in children and in grown people, but which is a mere condition of the animal nature. We all know that there are good-natured animals and irritable animals, — that the cow is tranquil and gentle, and the hyena snarly and fretful; but we never think of praising and rewarding the one, or punishing the other, for this obvious conformation. But in the case of the human animal it always happens that he who has the good luck to have a quiet, imperturbable nature has also the further good luck of being praised for it as for a Christian virtue, while he who has the ill fortune to be born with irritable nerves has the further ill fortune of being always considered a sinner on account of it.

Nobody that has not suffered from such causes can tell the amount of torture that a child of a certain nervous formation undergoes in the mere process of getting accustomed to his body, to the physical forces of life, and to the ways and doings of that world of grown-up people who have taken possession of the earth before him, and are using it, and determined to go on using it, for their own behoof and convenience, in spite of his childish efforts to push in his little individuality and seize his little portion of existence. He is at once laid hold upon by the older majority as an instrument to work out their views of what is fit and proper for himself and themselves; and if he proves a hard-

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working or creaking instrument, has the further capability of being rebuked and chastened for it.

My first morning feeling was generally one of anger at the sound of Aunt Lois's heels, worthy soul! I have lived to see the day when the tap of those efficient little instruments has seemed to me a most praiseworthy and desirable sound; but in those days they seemed only to be the reveille by which I was awakened to that daily battle of my will with hers which formed so great a feature in my life. It imposed in the first place the necessity of my quitting my warm bed in a room where the thermometer must have stood below zero, and where the snow, drifting through the loosely framed window, often lay in long wreaths on the floor.

As Aunt Lois always opened the door and set in a lighted candle, one of my sinful amusements consisted in lying and admiring the forest of glittering frost-work which had been made by our breath freezing upon the threads of the blanket. I sometimes saw rainbow colors in this frost-work, and went off into dreams and fancies about it, which ended in a doze, from which I was awakened, perhaps, by some of the snow from the floor rubbed smartly on my face, and the words, "How many times must you be called?" and opened my eyes to the vision of Aunt Lois standing over me indignant and admonitory.

Then I would wake Harry. We would spring from the bed and hurry on our clothes, buttoning them with fingers numb with cold, and run down to the back sink-room, where, in water that flew off in icy spatters, we performed our morning ablutions, refreshing our faces and hands by a brisk rub upon a coarse rolling-towel of brown homespun linen. Then with mittens, hats, and comforters, we were ready to turn out with old Cæsar to the barn to help him fodder the cattle. I must say that, when it came to this, on the whole it began to be grand fun for us. As Cæsar

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went ahead of us with his snow-shovel, we plunged laughing and rolling into the powdery element, with which we plentifully pelted him. Arrived at the barn we climbed, like cats, upon the mow, whence we joyously threw down enough for all his foddering purposes, and with such superabundant good-will in our efforts, that, had need so required, we would have stayed all day and flung off all the hay upon the mow; in fact, like the broomstick in the fable, which would persist in bringing water without rhyme or reason, so we overwhelmed our sable friend with avalanches of hay, which we cast down upon him in an inconsiderate fury of usefulness, and out of which we laughed to see him tear his way, struggling, gesticulating and remonstrating, till his black face shone with perspiration, and his woolly head bristled with hayseeds and morsels of clover.

Then came the feeding of the hens and chickens and other poultry, a work in which we especially delighted, going altogether beyond Cæsar in our largesses of corn, and requiring a constant interposition of his authority to prevent our emptying the crib on every single occasion.

In very severe weather we sometimes found hens or turkeys so overcome with the cold as to require, in Cæsar's view, hospital treatment. This awoke our sympathies, and stimulated our sense of personal importance, and we were never so happy as when trudging back through the snow, following Cæsar with a great cock-turkey lying languidly over his shoulder like a sick baby, his long neck drooping, his wattles, erst so fiery red with pride and valor, now blue and despairing. Great on such occasions were our zeal and excitement, as the cavalcade burst into the kitchen with much noise, and upturning of everything, changing Aunt Lois's quiet arrangements into an impromptu sanitary commission. My grandmother bestirred herself promptly, compounding messes of Indian-meal enlivened with peppercorns, which were forced incontinently down the long throat, and which in due time acted as a restorative.

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A turkey treated in this way soon recovered his wonted pride of demeanor, and, with an ingratitude which is like the ways of this world, would be ready to bully my grandmother and fly at her back when she was picking up chips, and charge down upon us children with vociferous gobblings, the very first warm day afterwards. Such toils as these before breakfast gave a zest to the smoking hot brown bread, the beans and sausages, which formed our morning meal.

The great abundance of food in our New England life is one subject quite worthy of reflection, if we consider the hardness of the soil, the extreme severity of the climate, and the shortness of the growing season between the late frosts of spring and those of early autumn. But, as matter of fact, good, plain food was everywhere in New England so plentiful, that at the day I write of nobody could really suffer for the want of it. The theocracy of New England had been so thoroughly saturated with the humane and charitable spirit of the old laws of Moses, in which, dealing "bread to the hungry" is so often reiterated and enforced as foremost among human duties, that no one ever thought of refusing food to any that appeared to need it; and a traveler might have walked on foot from one end of New England to the other, as sure of a meal in its season as he was that he saw a farmhouse. Even if there was now and then a Nabal like Crab Smith, who, from a native viciousness, hated to do kindness, there was always sure to be in his family an Abigail, ashamed of his baseness, who redeemed the credit of the house by a surreptitious practice of the Christian virtues.

I mention all this because it strikes me, in review of my childhood, that, although far from wealth, and living in many respects in a hard and rough way, I remember great enjoyment in that part of our physical life so important to a child, — the eating and drinking. Our bread, to

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be sure, was the black compound of rye and Indian which the economy of Massachusetts then made the common form, because it was the result of what could be most easily raised on her hard and stony soil; but I can inform all whom it may concern that rye and Indian bread smoking hot, on a cold winter morning, together with savory sausages, pork, and beans, formed a breakfast fit for a king, if the king had earned it by getting up in a cold room, washing in ice-water, tumbling through snow-drifts, and foddering cattle. We partook of it with a thorough cheeriness; and black Cæsar, seated on his block in the chimney-corner, divided his rations with Bose, the yellow dog of our establishment, with a contentment which it was pleasant to behold.

After breakfast grandfather conducted family prayers, commencing always by reading his chapter in the Bible. He read regularly through in course, as was the custom in those days, without note, comment, or explanation. Among the many insensible forces which formed the minds of New England children, was this constant, daily familiarity with the letter of the Bible. It was for the most part read twice a day in every family of any pretensions to respectability, and it was read as a reading-book in every common school, — in both cases without any attempt at explanation. Such parts as explained themselves were left to do so. Such as were beyond our knowledge were still read, and left to make what impression they would. For my part, I am impatient of the theory of those who think that nothing that is not understood makes any valuable impression on the mind of a child. I am certain that the constant contact of the Bible with my childish mind was a very great mental stimulant, as it certainly was a cause of a singular and vague pleasure. The wild, poetic parts of the prophecies, with their bold figures, vivid exclamations, and strange Oriental names and images, filled me with a quaint and solemn delight. Just as a child brought

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up under the shadow of the great cathedrals of the Old World, wandering into them daily, at morning, or eventide, beholding the many-colored windows flamboyant with strange legends of saints and angels, and neither understanding the legends, nor comprehending the architecture, is yet stilled and impressed, till the old minster grows into his growth and fashions his nature, so this wonderful old cathedral book insensibly wrought a sort of mystical poetry into the otherwise hard and sterile life of New England. Its passionate Oriental phrases, its quaint, pathetic stories, its wild, transcendent bursts of imagery, fixed an indelible mark in my imagination. Where Kedar and Tarshish and Pul and Lud, Chittim and the Isles, Dan and Beersheba, were, or what they were, I knew not, but they were fixed stations in my realm of cloud-land. I knew them as well as I knew my grandmother's rocking-chair, yet the habit of hearing of them only in solemn tones, and in the readings of religious hours, gave to them a mysterious charm. I think no New Englander, brought up under the *régime* established by the Puritans, could really estimate how much of himself had actually been formed by this constant face-to-face intimacy with Hebrew literature. It is worthy of remark, too, that, although in details relating to human crime and vice, the Old Bible is the most plain-spoken book conceivable, it never violated the chastity of a child's mind, or stimulated an improper curiosity. I have been astonished in later years to learn the real meaning of passages to which, in family prayers, I listened with innocent gravity.

My grandfather's prayers had a regular daily form, to which, in time, I became quite accustomed. No man of not more than ordinary capacity ever ministered twice a day the year round, in the office of priest to his family, without soon learning to repeat the same ideas in the same phrases, forming to himself a sort of individual liturgy.

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My grandfather always prayed standing, and the image of his mild, silvery head, leaning over the top of the high-backed chair, always rises before me as I think of early days. There was no great warmth or fervor in these daily exercises, but rather a serious and decorous propriety. They were Hebraistic in their form; they spoke of Zion and Jerusalem, of the God of Israel, the God of Jacob, as much as if my grandfather had been a veritable Jew; and except for the closing phrase, "for the sake of thy Son, our Saviour," might all have been uttered in Palestine by a well-trained Jew in the time of David.

When prayers were over every morning, the first move of the day, announced in Aunt Lois's brief energetic phrases, was to "get the boys out of the way." Our dinner was packed in a small splint basket, and we were started on our way to the district school, about a mile distant. We had our sleds with us, — dear winter companions of boys, — not the gayly painted, genteel little sledges with which Boston boys in these days enliven the Common, but rude, coarse fabrics, got up by Cæsar in rainy days out of the odds and ends of old sleigh-runners and such rough boards as he could rudely fashion with saw and hatchet. Such as they were, they suited us well, — mine in particular, because upon it I could draw Tina to school; for already, children as we were, things had naturally settled themselves between us. She was supreme mistress, and I the too happy slave, only anxious to be permitted to do her bidding. With Harry and me she assumed the negligent airs of a little empress. She gave us her books to carry, called on us to tie her shoes, charged us to remember her errands, got us to learn her lessons for her, and to help her out with whatever she had no mind to labor at; and we were only too happy to do it. Harry was the most doting of brothers, and never could look on Tina in any other light than as one whom he must at any price save from

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every care and every exertion; and as for me, I never dreamed of disputing her supremacy.

One may, perhaps, wonder how a person so extremely aristocratic in all her ideas of female education as Miss Mehitable should commit her little charge to the chance comradeship and unselect society of the district school. But Miss Mehitable, like many another person who has undertaken the task of bringing up a human being, found herself reduced to the doing of a great many things which she had never expected to do. She prepared for her work in the most thorough manner; she read Locke and Milton, and Dr. Gregory's "Legacy to his Daughter," and Mrs. Chapone on the bringing up of girls, to say nothing of Miss Hannah More and all the other wise people; and, after forming some of the most carefully considered and select plans of operation for herself and her little charge, she was at length driven to the discovery that in education, as in all other things, people who cannot do as they would must do as they can. She discovered that a woman between fifty and sixty years of age, of a peculiar nature, and with very fixed, set habits, could not undertake to be the sole companion and educator of a lively, willful, spirited little pilgrim of mortality, who was as active as a squirrel, and as inconsequent and uncertain in all her movements as a butterfly.

By some rare good fortune of nature or of grace, she found her little *protégée* already able to read with fluency, and a tolerable mistress of the use of the needle and thimble. Thus she possessed the key of useful knowledge and of useful feminine practice. But truth compels us to state that there appeared not the smallest prospect, during the first few weeks of Miss Mehitable's educational efforts, that she would ever make a good use of either. In vain Miss Mehitable had written a nice card, marking out regular hours for sewing, for reading, for geography and grammar, with suitable intervals of amusement; and in vain Miss Tina,

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with edifying enthusiasm, had promised, with large eyes and most abundant eloquence, and with many overflowing caresses, to be "so good." Alas! when it came to carrying out the programme, all alone in the old house, Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and all days, Tina gaped and nestled, and lost her thimble and her needle, and was infinite in excuses, and infinite in wheedling caresses, and arguments, enforced with flattering kisses, in favor of putting off the duties now of this hour and then of that, and substituting something more to her fancy. She had a thousand plans of her own for each passing hour, and no end of argument and eloquence to persuade her old friend to follow her ways, — to hear her read an old ballad instead of applying herself to her arithmetic lesson, or listen to her recital of something that she had just picked out of English history, or let her finish a drawing that she was just inspired to commence, or spend a bright, sunny hour in flower-gatherings and rambles by the brown river-side; whence she would return laden with flowers, and fill every vase in the old, silent room till it would seem as if the wilderness had literally blossomed as the rose. Tina's knack for the arranging of vases and twining of vines and sorting of wild-flowers amounted to a species of genius; and, as it was something of which Miss Mehitable had not the slightest comprehension, the child took the lead in this matter with a confident assurance. And, after all, the effect was so cheerful and so delightful, that Miss Mehitable could not find it in her heart to call to the mind of the little wood-fairy how many hours these cheerful decorations had cost.

Thus poor Miss Mehitable found herself daily being drawn, by the leash that held this gay bird, into all sorts of unseemly gyrations and wanderings, instead of using it to tether the bird to her own well-considered purposes. She could not deny that the child was making her old

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days pass in a very amusing manner, and it was so much easier to follow the lively little sprite in all her airy ways and caprices, seeing her lively and spirited and happy, than to watch the ennui and the yawns and the restlessness that came over her with every effort to conform to the strict letter of the programme, that good Miss Mehitable was always yielding. Every night she went to bed with an unquiet conscience, sensible that, though she had had an entertaining day, she had been letting Tina govern her, instead of governing Tina.

Over that grave supposed necessity of governing Tina, this excellent woman groaned in spirit on many a night after the little wheedling tongue had become silent, and the bright, deluding eyes had gone down under their fringy lashes. "The fact is," said the sad old woman, "Miss Asphyxia spoke the truth. It is a fact, I am not fit to bring up a child. She does rule over me, just as she said she would, and I 'm a poor old fool; but then, what am I to do? She is so bright and sweet and pretty, and I 'm a queer-looking, dry, odd old woman, with nobody to love me if she does n't. If I cross her and tie her to rules, and am severe with her, she won't love me, and I am too selfish to risk that. Besides, only think what came of using severe measures with poor Emily! people can be spoilt by severity just as much as by indulgence, and more hopelessly. But what shall I do?"

Miss Mehitable at first had some hope of supporting and backing up the weaknesses of her own heart by having recourse to Polly's well-known energy. Polly was a veritable dragon of education, and strong in the most efficient articles of faith. Children must have their wills broken, as she expressed it, "short off;" they must mind the very first time you speak; they must be kept under and made to go according to rule, and, if they swerved, Polly recommended measures of most sanguinary severity.

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But somehow or other Tina had contrived to throw over this grimmest and most Calvinistic of virgins the glamour of her presence, so that she ruled, reigned, and predominated in the most awful sanctuaries of Polly's kitchen, with a fearfully unconcerned and negligent freedom. She dared to peep into her yeast-jug in the very moment of projection, and to pinch off from her downy puffs of newly raised bread sly morsels for her own cooking experiments; she picked from Polly's very hand the raisins which the good woman was stoning for the most awfully sacred election cake, and resolutely persisted in hanging on her chair and chattering in her ear during the evolution of high culinary mysteries with which the Eleusinian, or any other heathen trumperies of old, were not to be named. Had n't the receipt for election cake been in the family for one hundred years? and was not Polly the sacred ark and tabernacle in which that divine secret presided? Even Miss Mehitable had always been politely requested to step out of the kitchen when Polly was composing her mind for this serious work, but yet Tina neglected her geography and sewing to be present, chattered all the time, as Polly remarked, like a grist-mill, tasted the sugar and spices, and helped herself at intervals to the savory composition as it was gradually being put together, announcing her opinions, and giving Polly her advice, with an effrontery to which Polly's submission was something appalling.

It really used to seem to Miss Mehitable, as she listened to Polly's dissonant shrieks of laughter from the kitchen, as if that venerable old girl must be slightly intoxicated. Polly's laughter was in truth something quite formidable. All the organs in her which would usually be employed in this exercise were so rusty for want of use, so choked up with theological dust and débris, that when brought into exercise they had a wild, grating, dissonant sound, rather calculated to alarm. Miss Mehitable really wondered if

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this could be the same Polly of whom she herself stood in a certain secret awe, whose premises she never invaded, and whose will over and about her had been always done instead of her own; but if she ventured to open the kitchen door and recall Tina, she was sure to be vigorously snubbed by Polly, who walked over all her own precepts and maxims in the most shameless and astonishing manner.

Polly, however, made up for her own compliances by heaping up censures on poor Miss Mehitable when Tina had gone to bed at night. When the bright eyes were fairly closed, and the little bewitching voice hushed in sleep, Polly's conscience awoke like an armed man, and she atoned for her own sins of compliance and indulgence by stringently admonishing Miss Mehitable that she must be more particular about that child, and not let her get her own head so much, — most unblushingly ignoring her own share in abetting her transgressions, and covering her own especial sins under the declaration that "*she* never had undertaken to bring the child up, — she had to get along with her the best way she could, — but the child never would make anything if she was let to go on so." Yet, in any particular case that arose, Polly was always sure to go over to Tina's side and back her usurpations.

For example, it is to be confessed that Tina never could or would be got to bed at those hours which are universally admitted to be canonical for well-brought-up children. As night drew on, the little one's tongue ran with increasing fluency, and her powers of entertainment waxed more dizzy and dazzling; and so, oftentimes, as the drizzling, freezing night shut in, and the wind piped and howled lonesomely round the corners of the dusky old mansion, neither of the two forlorn women could find it in her heart to extinguish the little cheerful candle of their dwelling in bed; and so she was to them ballet and opera as she sung and danced, mimicked the dog, mimicked the cat and the hens and the

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tom-turkey, and at last talked and flew about the room like Aunt Lois, stirred up butter and pshawed like grandma, or invented imaginary scenes and conversations, or improvised unheard-of costumes out of strange old things she had rummaged out of Miss Mehitable's dark closets. Neither of the two worthy women had ever seen the smallest kind of dramatic representation, so that Tina's histrionic powers fascinated them by touching upon dormant faculties, and seemed more wonderful for their utter novelty; and more than once, to the poignant self-reproach of Miss Mehitable, and Polly's most moral indignation, nine o'clock struck, in the inevitable tones of the old family timepiece, before they were well aware what they were doing. Then Tina would be hustled off to bed, and Polly would preach Miss Mehitable a strenuous discourse on the necessity of keeping children to regular hours, interspersed with fragments of quotations from one of her venerable father's early sermons on the Christian bringing up of households. Polly would grow inexorable as conscience on these occasions, and when Miss Mehitable humbly pleaded in extenuation how charming a little creature it was, and what a pleasant evening she had given, Polly would shake her head, and declare that the ways of sin were always pleasant for a time, but at the last it would "bite like a serpent and sting like an adder;" and when Miss Mehitable, in the most delicate manner, would insinuate that Polly had been sharing the forbidden fruit, such as it was, Polly would flare up in sudden wrath, and declare that "everything that went wrong was always laid to her."

In consequence of this, though Miss Mehitable found the first few weeks with her little charge altogether the gayest and brightest that had diversified her dreary life, yet there was a bitter sense of self-condemnation and perplexity with it all. One day she opened her mind to my grandmother.

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"Laws a massy! don't try to teach her yourself," said that plain-spoken old individual, — "send her to school with the boys. Children have to go in droves. What 's the use of fussing with 'em all day? let the schoolmaster take a part of the care. Children have to be got rid of sometimes, and we come to them all the fresher for having them out of our sight."

The consequence was, that Tina rode to school on our sleds in triumph, and made more fun, and did more mischief, and learned less, and was more adored and desired, than any other scholar of us all.

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CHAPTER XXIII

WE TAKE A STEP UP IN THE WORLD

One of my most vivid childish remembrances is the length of our winters, the depth of the snows, the raging fury of the storms that used to whirl over the old farm-house, shrieking and piping and screaming round each angle and corner, and thundering down the chimney in a way that used to threaten to topple all down before it.

The one great central kitchen fire was the only means of warming known in the house, and duly at nine o'clock every night *that* was raked up, and all the family took their way to bed-chambers that never knew a fire, where the very sheets and blankets seemed so full of stinging cold air that they made one's fingers tingle; and where, after getting into bed, there was a prolonged shiver, until one's own internal heat-giving economy had warmed through the whole icy mass. Delicate people had these horrors ameliorated by the application of a brass warming-pan, — an article of high respect and repute in those days, which the modern conveniences for warmth in our houses have entirely banished.

Then came the sleet storms, when the trees bent and creaked under glittering mail of ice, and every sprig and spray of any kind of vegetation was reproduced in sparkling crystals. These were cold days *par excellence*, when everybody talked of the weather as something exciting and tremendous, — when the cider would freeze in the cellar, and the bread in the milk-room would be like blocks of ice, — when not a drop of water could be got out of the

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sealed well, and the very chimney-back over the raked-up fire would be seen in the morning sparkling with a rime of frost crystals. How the sledges used to squeak over the hard snow, and the breath freeze on the hair, and beard, and woolly comforters around the necks of the men, as one and another brought in news of the wonderful, unheard-of excesses of Jack Frost during the foregone night! There was always something exhilarating about those extremely cold days, when a very forest of logs, heaped up and burning in the great chimney, could not warm the other side of the kitchen; and when Aunt Lois, standing with her back so near the blaze as to be uncomfortably warm, yet found her dish-towel freezing in her hand, while she wiped the teacup drawn from the almost boiling water. When things got to this point, we little folks were jolly. It was an excitement, an intoxication; it filled life full of talk. People froze the tips of their noses, their ears, their toes; we froze our own. Whoever touched a door-latch incautiously, in the early morning, received a skinning bite from Jack. The axe, the saw, the hatchet, all the iron tools, in short, were possessed of a cold devil ready to snap out at any incautious hand that meddled with him. What ponderous stalactites of ice used to hang from the eaves, and hung unmelted days, weeks, and months, dripping a little, perhaps, towards noon, but hardening again as night came on! and how long all this lasted! To us children it seemed ages.

Then came April with here and there a sunny day. A bluebird would be vaguely spoken of as having appeared. Sam Lawson was usually the first to announce the fact, to the sharp and skeptical contempt of his helpmeet.

On a shimmering April morning, with a half-mind to be sunshiny, Sam saw Harry and myself trotting by his door, and called to us for a bit of gossip.

"Lordy massy, boys, ain't it pleasant? Why, bless

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your soul and body, I do believe spring 's a-comin', though Hepsy she won't believe it," he said, as he leaned over the fence contemplatively, with the axe in his hand. "I heard a bluebird last week, Jake Marshall and me, when we was goin' over to Hopkinton to see how Ike Saunders is. You know he is down with the measles. I went over to offer to sit up with him. Where be ye goin' this mornin'?"

"We 're going to the minister's. Grandfather is n't well, and Lady Lothrop told us to come for some wine."

"Jes' so," said Sam. "Wal, now, he orter take something for his stomach's sake, Scriptur' goes in for that. A little good hot spiced wine, it 's jest the thing; and Ma'am Lothrop she has the very best. Why, some o' that 'ere wine o' her'n come over from England years ago, when her fust husband was living; and he was a man that knew where to get his things. Wal, you must n't stop to play; allers remember when you 're sent on errands not to be a-idlin' on the road."

"Sam Lawson, will you split me that oven-wood, or won't you?" said a smart, cracking voice, as the door flew open and Hepsy's thin face and snapping black eyes appeared, as she stood with a weird, wiry, sharp-visaged baby exalted on one shoulder, while in the other hand she shook a dish-cloth.

"Lordy massy, Hepsy, I 'm splittin' as fast as I can. There, run along, boys; don't stop to play."

We ran along, for, truth to say, the vision of Hepsy's sharp features always quickened our speed, and we heard the loud, high-pitched storm of matrimonial objurgation long after we had left them behind.

Timidly we struck the great knocker, and with due respect and modesty told our errand to the black doctor of divinity who opened the door.

"I 'll speak to Missis," he said; "but this 'ere 's Missis'

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great day; it 's Good Friday, and she don't come out of her room the whole blessed day."

"But she sent word that we should come," we both answered in one voice.

"Well, you jest wait here while I go up and see," — and the important messenger creaked up stairs on tiptoe with infinite precaution, and knocked at a chamber door.

Now there was something in all this reception that was vaguely solemn and impressive to us. The minister's house of itself was a dignified and august place. The minister was in our minds great and greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of them that were about him. The minister's wife was a very great lady, who wore very stiff silks, and rode in a coach, and had no end of unknown wealth at her control, so ran the village gossip. And now what this mysterious Good Friday was, and why the house was so still, and why the black doctor of divinity tiptoed up stairs so stealthily, and knocked at her door so timidly, we could not exactly conjecture; it was all of a piece with the general marvelous and supernatural character of the whole establishment.

We heard above the silvery well-bred tones that marked Lady Lothrop. "Tell the children to come up."

We looked at each other, and each waited a moment for the other to lead the way; finally I took the lead, and Harry followed. We entered a bedroom shaded in a sombre gloom which seemed to our childish eyes mysterious and impressive. There were three windows in the room, but the shutters were closed, and the only light that came in was from heart-shaped apertures in each one. There was in one corner a tall, solemn-looking, high-post bedstead with heavy crimson draperies. There were heavy carved bureaus and chairs of black, solid oak.

At a table covered with dark cloth sat Lady Lothrop, dressed entirely in black, with a great Book of Common

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Prayer spread out before her. The light from the heart-shaped hole streamed down upon this prayer-book in a sort of dusky shaft, and I was the more struck and impressed because it was not an ordinary volume, but a great folio bound in parchment, with heavy brass knobs and clasps, printed in black-letter, of that identical old edition first prepared in King Edward's time, and appointed to be read in churches. Its very unusual and antique appearance impressed me with a kind of awe.

There was at the other end of the room a tall, full-length mirror, which, as we advanced, duplicated the whole scene, giving back faithfully the image of the spare figure of Lady Lothrop, her grave and serious face, and the strange old book over which she seemed to be bending, with a dusky gleaming of crimson draperies in the background.

"Come here, my children," she said, as we hesitated; "how is your grandfather?"

"He is not so well to-day; and grandmamma said" —

"Yes, yes; I know," she said, with a gentle little wave of the hand; "I desired that you might be sent for some wine; Pompey shall have it ready for you. But tell me, little boys, do you know what day this is?"

"It 's Friday, ma'am," said I, innocently.

"Yes, my child; but do you know what Friday it is?" she said.

"No, ma'am," said I, faintly.

"Well, my child, it is Good Friday; and do you know why it is called Good Friday?"

"No, ma'am."

"This is the day when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died on the cross for our salvation; so we call it Good Friday."

I must confess that these words struck me with a strange and blank amazement. That there had been in this world a personage called "Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,"

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I had learned from the repetition of his name as the usual ending of prayers at church and in the family; but the real literal fact that he had lived on earth had never presented itself to me in any definite form before; but this solemn and secluded room, this sombre woman shut out from all the ordinary ways of the world, devoting the day to lonely musing, gave to her words a strange reality.

"When did he die?" I said.

"More than a thousand years ago," she answered.

Insensibly Harry had pressed forward till he stood in the shaft of light, which fell upon his golden curls, and his large blue eyes now had that wide-open, absorbed expression with which he always listened to anything of a religious nature, and, as if speaking involuntarily, he said eagerly, "But he is not dead. He is living; and we pray to him."

"Why, yes, my son," said Lady Lothrop, turning and looking with pleased surprise, which became more admiring as she gazed, — "yes, he rose from the dead."

"I know. Mother told me all about that. Day after to-morrow will be Easter day," said Harry; "I remember."

A bright flush of pleased expression passed over Lady Lothrop's face as she said, "I am glad, my boy, that *you* at least have been taught. Tell me, boys," she said at last, graciously, "should you like to go with me in my carriage to Easter Sunday in Boston?"

Had a good fairy offered to take us on the rainbow to the palace of the sunset, the offer could not have seemed more unworldly and dream-like. What Easter Sunday was I had not the faintest idea, but I felt it to be something vague, strange, and remotely suggestive of the supernatural.

Harry, however, stood the thing in the simple, solemn, gentlemanlike way which was habitual with him.

"Thank you, ma'am; I shall be very happy, if grandmamma is willing."

It will be seen that Harry slid into the adoptive familiar-

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ity which made my grandmother his, with the easy good faith of childhood.

"Tell your grandmamma if she is willing, I shall call for you in my coach to-morrow," — and we were graciously dismissed.

We ran home in all haste with our bottle of wine, and burst into the kitchen, communicating our message both at once to Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah. The two women looked at each other mysteriously; there was a slight flush on Aunt Lois's keen, spare face.

"Well, if she 's a mind to do it, Kezzy, I don't see how we can refuse."

"Mother never would consent in the world," said Aunt Keziah.

"Mother must," said Aunt Lois, with decision. "We can't afford to offend Lady Lothrop, with both these boys on our hands. Besides, now father is sick, what a mercy to have 'em both out of the house for a Sunday!"

Aunt Lois spoke this with an intensive earnestness that deepened my already strong convictions that we boys were a daily load upon her life, only endured by a high and protracted exercise of Christian fortitude.

She rose and tapped briskly into the bedroom where my grandmother was sitting reading by my grandfather's bed. I heard her making some rapid statements, in a subdued, imperative tone. There were a few moments of a sort of suppressed, earnest hum of conversation, and soon we heard sundry vehement interjections from my grandmother, — "Good Friday! — Easter! — pish, Lois! — don't tell me! — old cast-off rags of the scarlet woman, — nothing else.

> 'Abbor the arrant whore of Rome,
> And all her blasphemies;
> Drink not of her accursed cup,
> Obey not her decrees.'"

"Now, mother, how absurd!" I heard Aunt Lois say.

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"Who 's talking about Rome? I 'm sure, if Dr. Lothrop can allow it, we can. It 's all nonsense to talk so. We don't want to offend our minister's wife; we must do the things that make for peace;" and then the humming went on for a few moments more and more earnestly, till finally we heard grandmother break out: —

"Well, well, have it your own way, Lois, — you always did and always will, I suppose. Glad the boys 'll have a holiday, anyhow. She means well, I dare say, — thinks she 's doing right."

I must say that this was a favorite formula with which my grandmother generally let herself down from the high platform of her own sharply defined opinions to the level of Christian charity with her neighbors.

"Who is the whore of Rome?" said Harry to me, confidentially, when we had gone to our room to make ready for our jaunt the next day.

"Don't you know?" said I. "Why, it 's the one that burnt John Rogers, in the Catechism. I can show it to you;" and, forthwith producing from my small stock of books my New England Primer, I called his attention to the picture of Mr. John Rogers in gown and bands, standing in the midst of a brisk and voluminous coil of fire and smoke, over which an executioner, with a supernatural broadaxe upon his shoulders, seeemed to preside with grim satisfaction. There was a woman with a baby in her arms and nine children at her side, who stood in a row, each head being just a step lower than the preceding, so that they made a regular flight of stairs. The artist had represented the mother and all the children with a sort of round bundle on each of their heads, of about the same size as the head itself, — a thing which I always interpreted as a further device of the enemy in putting stones on their heads to crush them down; and I pointed it out to Harry as an aggravating feature of the martyrdom.

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"Did the whore of Rome do that?" said Harry, after a few moments' reflection.

"Yes, she did, and it tells about it in the poetry which he wrote here to his children the night before his execution," and forthwith I proceeded to read to Harry that whole poetical production, delighted to find a gap in his education which I was competent to fill. We were both wrought up into a highly Protestant state by reading this.

"Horace," said Harry, timidly, "*she* would n't like such things, would she? she is such a good woman."

"What, Lady Lothrop? of course she 's a good woman; else she would n't be our minister's wife."

"What was grandma talking about?" said Harry.

"Oh, I don't know; grandmother talks about a great many things," said I. "At any rate, we shall see Boston, and I 've always wanted to see Boston. Only think, Harry, we shall go in a coach!"

This projected tour to Boston was a glorification of us children in the eyes of the whole family. To go, on the humblest of terms, *to Boston*, — but to be taken thither in Lady Lothrop's coach, to be trotted in magnificently behind her fat pair of carriage-horses, — that was a good fortune second only to translation.

Boston lay at an easy three hours' ride from Oldtown, and Lady Lothrop had signified to my grandmother that we were to be called for soon after dinner. We were to spend the night and the Sunday following at the house of Lady Lothrop's mother, who still kept the old family mansion at the North End, and Lady Lothrop was graciously pleased to add that she would keep the children over Easter Monday, to show them Boston. Faithful old soul, she never omitted the opportunity of reminding the gainsaying community among whom her lot was cast of the solemn days of her church, and for one *I* have remembered Easter Sunday and Monday to this day.

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Our good fortune received its crowning stroke in our eyes when, running over to Miss Mehitable's with the news, we found that Lady Lothrop had considerately included Tina in the invitation.

"Well, she must like children better than I do," was Aunt Lois's comment upon the fact, when we announced it. "Now, boys, mind and behave yourselves like young gentlemen," she added, "for you are going to one of the oldest families of Boston, among real genteel people."

"They 're Tories, Lois," put in Aunt Keziah apprehensively.

"Well, what of that? that thing 's over and gone now," said Aunt Lois, "and nobody lays it up against the Kitterys, and everybody knows they were in the very first circles in Boston before the war, and connected with the highest people in England, so it was quite natural they should be Tories."

"I should n't wonder if Lady Widgery should be there," said Aunt Keziah musingly, as she twitched her yarn; "she always used to come to Boston about this time o' the year."

"Very likely she will," said my mother. "What relation is she to Lady Lothrop?"

"Why, bless me, don't you know?" said Aunt Lois. "Why, she was Polly Steadman, and sister to old Ma'am Kittery's husband's first wife. She was second wife to Sir Thomas; his first wife was one of the Keatons of Penshurst, in England; she died while Sir Thomas was in the custom-house; she was a poor, sickly thing. Polly was a great beauty in her day. People said he admired her rather too much before his wife died, but I don't know how that was."

"I wonder what folks want to say such things for," quoth my grandmother. "I hate backbiters, for my part."

"We are n't backbiting, mother. I only said how the

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story ran. It was years ago, and poor Sir Thomas is in his grave long ago."

"Then you might let him rest there," said my grandmother. "Lady Widgery was a pleasant-spoken woman, I remember."

"She 's quite an invalid now, I heard," said Aunt Lois. "Our Bill was calling at the Kitterys' the other day, and Miss Deborah Kittery spoke of expecting Lady Widgery. The Kitterys have been very polite to Bill; they 've invited him there to dinner once or twice this winter. That was one reason why I thought we ought to be careful how we treat Lady Lothrop's invitation. It 's entirely through her influence that Bill gets these attentions."

"I don't know about their being the best thing for him," said my grandmother, doubtfully.

"Mother, how can you talk so? What can be better than for a young man to have the run of good families in Boston?" said Aunt Lois.

"I 'd rather see him have intimacy with one godly minister of old times," said my grandmother.

"Well, that 's what Bill is n't likely to do," quoth Aunt Lois, with a slight shade of impatience. "We must take boys as we find 'em."

"I have n't anything against Tories or Episcopalians," said my grandmother; "but they ain't our sort of folks. I dare say they mean as well as they know how."

"Miss Mehitable visits the Kitterys when she is in Boston," said Aunt Lois, "and thinks everything of them. She says that Deborah Kittery is a very smart, intelligent woman, — a woman of a very strong mind."

"I dare say they 're well enough," said my grandmother. "I 'm sure I wish 'em well with all my heart."

"Now, Horace," said Aunt Lois, "be careful you don't sniff, and be sure and wipe your shoes on the mat when you come in, and never on any account speak a word un-

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less you are spoken to. Little boys should be seen and not heard; and be very careful you never touch anything you see. It is very good of Lady Lothrop to be willing to take all the trouble of having you with her, and you must make her just as little as possible."

I mentally resolved to reduce myself to a nonentity, to go out of existence, as it were, to be nobody and nowhere, if only I might escape making trouble.

"As to Harry, he is always a good, quiet boy, and never touches things, or forgets to wipe his shoes," said my aunt. "I 'm sure he will behave himself."

My mother colored slightly at this undisguised partiality for Harry, but she was too much under Aunt Lois's discipline to venture a word.

"Lordy massy, Mis' Badger, how do ye all do?" said Sam Lawson, this moment appearing at the kitchen door. "I saw your winders so bright, I thought I 'd jest look in and ask after the Deacon. I ben into Miss Mehitable's, and there 's Polly, she telled me about the chillen goin' to Boston to-morrow. Tiny, she 's jest flying round and round like a lightning-bug, most out of her head, she 's so tickled; and Polly, she was a-i'nin' up her white aprons to get her up smart. Polly, she says it 's all pagan flummery about Easter, but she 's glad the chillen are goin' to have the holiday." And with this Sam Lawson seated himself on his usual evening roost in the corner, next to black Cæsar, and we both came and stood by his knee.

"Wal, boys, now you 're goin' among real, old-fashioned gentility. Them Kitterys used to hold their heads 'mazin' high afore the war, and they 've managed by hook and crook to hold on to most what they got, and now by-gones is by-gones. But I believe they don't go out much, or go into company. Old Ma'am Kittery, she 's kind o' broke up about her son that was killed at the Delaware."

"Fighting on the wrong side, poor woman," said my

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grandmother. "Well, I s'pose he thought he was doing right."

"Yes, yes," said Sam, "there 's all sorts o' folks go to make up a world, and, lordy massy, we must n't be hard on nobody; can't 'spect everybody to be right all round; it 's what I tell Polly when she sniffs at Lady Lothrop keepin' Christmas and Easter and sich. 'Lordy massy, Polly,' says I, 'if she reads her Bible, and 's good to the poor, and don't speak evil o' nobody, why, let her have her Easter; what 's the harm on't?' But, lordy massy bless your soul an' body! there 's no kind o' use talkin' to Polly. She fumed away there, over her i'nin' table; she did n't believe in folks that read their prayers out o' books; and then she hed it all over about them tew thousan' ministers that was all turned out o' the church in one day in old King Charles's time. Now, raily, Mis' Badger, I don't see why Lady Lothrop should be held 'sponsible for that are, if she is 'Piscopalian."

"Well, well," said my grandmother; "they did turn out the very best men in England, but the Lord took 'em for seed to plant America with. But no wonder we feel it: burnt children dread the fire. I 've nothing against Lady Lothrop, and I don't wish evil to the Episcopalians nor to the Tories. There 's good folks among 'em all, and 'the Lord knoweth them that are his.' But I do hope, Horace, that, when you get to Boston, you will go out on to Copp's Hill and see the graves of the Saints. There are the men that I want my children to remember. You come here, and let me read you about them in my 'Magnaly'[1] here." And with this my grandmother produced her well-worn copy; and, to say the truth, we were never tired of hearing what there was in it. What legends, wonderful and stirring, of the solemn old forest life, — of fights with the Indians, and thrilling adventures, and captivities, and

[1] Dr. Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*.

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distresses, — of encounters with panthers and serpents, and other wild beasts, which made our very hair stand on end! Then there were the weird witch-stories, so wonderfully attested; and how Mr. Peter So-and-so did visibly see, when crossing a river, a cat's head swimming in front of the boat, and the tail of the same following behind; and how worthy people had been badgered and harassed by a sudden friskiness in all their household belongings, in a manner not unknown in our modern days. Of all these fascinating legends my grandmother was a willing communicator, and had, to match them, numbers of corresponding ones from her own personal observation and experience; and sometimes Sam Lawson would chime in with long-winded legends, which, being told by flickering fire-light, with the wind rumbling and tumbling down the great chimney, or shrieking and yelling and piping around every corner of the house, like an army of fiends trying with tooth and claw to get in upon us, had power to send cold chills down our backs in the most charming manner.

For my part, I had not the slightest fear of the supernatural; it was to me only a delightful stimulant, just crisping the surface of my mind with a pleasing horror. I had not any doubt of the stories of apparitions related by Dr. Cotton, because I had seen so many of them myself; and I did not doubt that many of the witnesses who testified in these cases really *did see* what they said they saw, as plainly as I had seen similar appearances. The consideration of the fact that there really are people in whose lives such phenomena are of frequent occurrence seems to have been entirely left out of the minds of those who have endeavored to explain that dark passage in our history.

In my maturer years I looked upon this peculiarity as something resulting from a physical idiosyncrasy, and I have supposed that such affections may become at times epidemics in communities, as well as any other affection of

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the brain and nervous system. Whether the things thus discerned have an objective reality or not, has been one of those questions at which, all my life, the interrogation point has stood unerased.

On this evening, however, my grandmother thought fit to edify us by copious extracts from "The Second Part, entituled *Sepher-Jearim*, i. e. *Liber Deum Timentium;* or, Dead Abels; — yet speaking and spoken of."

The lives of several of these "Dead Abels" were her favorite reading, and to-night she designed especially to fortify our minds with their biographies; so she gave us short dips and extracts here and there from several of them, as, for example: "*Janus Nov.-Anglicus;* or, The Life of Mr. Samuel Higginson;" — "*Cadmus Americanus;* or, Life of Mr. Charles Chauncey;" — "*Cygnea Cantio;* or, The Death of Mr. John Avery;" — "*Fulgentius;* or, The Life of Mr. Richard Mather;" and "*Elisha's Bones;* or, Life of Mr. Henry Whitefield."

These Latin titles stimulated my imagination like the sound of a trumpet, and I looked them out diligently in my father's great dictionary, and sometimes astonished my grandmother by telling her what they meant.

In fact, I was sent to bed that night thoroughly fortified against all seductions of the gay and worldly society into which I was about to be precipitated; and my reader will see that there was need enough of this preparation.

All these various conversations in regard to differences of religion went on before us children with the freedom with which older people generally allow themselves to go on in the presence of the little non-combatants of life. In those days, when utter silence and reserve in the presence of elders was so forcibly inculcated as one of the leading virtues of childhood, there was little calculation made for the effect of such words on the childish mind. With me it was a perfect hazy mist of wonder and bewilderment;

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and I went to sleep and dreamed that John Rogers was burning Lady Lothrop at the stake, and Polly, as executioner, presided with a great broadaxe over her shoulder, while grandmother, with nine small children, all with stone bundles on their heads, assisted at the ceremony.

Our ride to Boston was performed in a most proper and edifying manner. Lady Lothrop sat erect and gracious on the back seat, and placed Harry, for whom she seemed to have conceived a special affection, by her side. Tina was perched on the knee of my lady's maid, a starched, prim woman who had grown up and dried in all the most sacred and sanctified essences of genteel propriety. She was the very crispness of old-time decorum, brought up to order herself lowly and reverently to all her betters, and with a secret conviction that, aside from Lady Lothrop, the whole of the Oldtown population were rather low Dissenters, whom she was required by the rules of Christian propriety to be kind to. To her master, as having been honored with the august favor of her mistress's hand, she looked up with respect, but her highest mark of approbation was in the oft-repeated burst which came from her heart in moments of confidential enthusiasm, — "Ah, ma'am, depend upon it, master is a churchman in his heart. If 'e 'ad only 'ad the good fortune to be born in Hengland, 'e would 'ave been a bishop!"

Tina had been talked to and schooled rigorously by Miss Mehitable as to propriety of manner during this ride; and, as Miss Mehitable well knew what a chatterbox she was, she exacted from her a solemn promise that she would only speak when she was spoken to. Being perched in Mrs. Margery's lap, she felt still further the stringent and binding power of that atmosphere of frosty decorum which encircled this immaculate waiting-maid. A more well-bred, inoffensive, reverential little trio never surrounded a lady patroness; and as Lady Lothrop was not much of a talker,

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and, being a childless woman, had none of those little arts of drawing out children which the maternal instinct alone teaches, our ride, though undoubtedly a matter of great enjoyment, was an enjoyment of a serious and even awful character. Lady Lothrop addressed a few kind inquiries to each one of us in turn, to which we each of us replied, and then the conversation fell into the hands of Mrs. Margery, and consisted mainly in precise details as to where and how she had packed her mistress's Sunday cap and velvet dress; in doing which she evinced the great fluency and fertility of language with which women of her class are gifted on the one subject of their souls. Mrs. Margery felt as if the Sunday cap of the only supporter of the true Church in the dark and heathen parish of Oldtown was a subject not to be lightly or unadvisedly considered; and, therefore, she told at great length how she had intended to pack it first all together, — how she had altered her mind and taken off the bow, and packed that in a little box by itself, and laid the strings out flat in the box, — what difficulties had met her in folding the velvet dress, — and how she had at first laid it on top of the trunk, but had decided at last that the black lutestring might go on top of that, because it was so much lighter, etc., etc., etc.

Lady Lothrop was so much accustomed to this species of monologue, that it is quite doubtful if she heard a word of it; but poor Tina, who felt within herself whole worlds of things to say, from the various objects upon the road, of which she was dying to talk and ask questions, wriggled and twisted upon Mrs. Margery's knee, and finally gave utterance to her pent-up feelings in deep sighs.

"What 's the matter, little dear?" said Lady Lothrop.

"Oh dear! I was just wishing I could go to church."

"Well, you are going to-morrow, dear."

"I just wish I could go now to say *one* prayer."

"And what is that, my dear?"

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"I just want to say, 'O Lord, open thou my lips,'" said Tina, with effusion.

Lady Lothrop smiled with an air of innocent surprise, and Mrs. Margery winked over the little head.

"I 'm so tired of not talking!" said Tina, pathetically; "but I promised Miss Mehitable I would n't speak unless I was spoken to," she added, with an air of virtuous resolution.

"Why, my little dear, you may talk," said Lady Lothrop. "It won't disturb me at all. Tell us now about anything that interests you."

"Oh, thank you ever so much," said Tina; and from this moment, as a little elfin butterfly bursts from a cold, gray chrysalis, Tina rattled and chattered and sparkled, and went on with *verve* and gusto that quite waked us all up. Lady Lothrop and Mrs. Margery soon found themselves laughing with a heartiness which surprised themselves; and, the icy chains of silence being once broken, we all talked, almost forgetting in whose presence we were. Lady Lothrop looked from one to another in a sort of pleased and innocent surprise. Her still, childless, decorous life covered and concealed many mute feminine instincts which now rose at the voice and touch of childhood; and sometimes in the course of our gambols she would sigh, perhaps thinking of her own childless hearth.

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CHAPTER XXIV

WE BEHOLD GRANDEUR

It was just at dusk that our carriage stood before the door of a respectable mansion at the North End of Boston.

I remember our alighting and passing through a wide hall with a dark oaken staircase, into a low-studded parlor, lighted by the blaze of a fire of hickory logs, which threw out tongues of yellow flame, and winked at itself with a thousand fanciful flashes, in the crinkles and angles of a singularly high and mighty pair of brass andirons.

A lovely, peaceful old lady, whose silvery white hair and black dress were the most striking features of the picture, kissed Lady Lothrop, and then came to us with a perfect outgush of motherly kindness. "Why, the poor little dears! the little darlings!" she said, as she began with her trembling fingers to undo Tina's bonnet-strings. "Did they want to come to Boston and see the great city? Well, they should. They must be cold; there, put them close by the fire, and grandma will get them a nice cake pretty soon. Here, I 'll hold the little lady," she said, as she put Tina on her knee.

The child nestled her head down on her bosom as lovingly and confidingly as if she had known her all her days. "Poor babe," said the old lady to Lady Lothrop, "who could have had a heart to desert such a child? and this is the boy," she said, drawing Harry to her and looking tenderly at him. "Well, a father of the fatherless is God in his holy habitation." There was something even grand about the fervor of this sentence as she uttered it, and

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Tina put up her hand with a caressing gesture around the withered old neck.

"Debby, get these poor children a cake," said the lady to a brisk, energetic, rather high-stepping individual, who now entered the apartment.

"Come, now, mother, do let it rest till supper-time. If we let you alone, you would murder all the children in your neighborhood with cake and sugar-plums; you 'd be as bad as King Herod."

Miss Debby was a well-preserved, up-and-down, positive, cheery, sprightly maiden lady of an age lying somewhere in the indeterminate region between forty and sixty. There was a positive, brusque way about all her movements, and she advanced to the fire, rearranged the wood, picked up stray brands, and whisked up the coals with a brush, and then, seating herself bolt upright, took up the business of making our acquaintance in the most precise and systematic manner.

"So this is Master Horace Holyoke. How do you do, sir?" As previously directed, I made my best bow with anxious politeness.

"And this is Master Harry Percival, is it?" Harry did the same.

"And this," she added, turning to Tina, "is Miss Tina Percival, I understand? Well, we are very happy to see *good* little children in this house always." There was a rather severe emphasis on the *good*, which, together with the somewhat martial and disciplinary air which invested all Miss Deborah's words and actions, was calculated to strike children with a wholesome awe.

Our resolution "to be very good indeed" received an immediate accession of strength. At this moment a serving-maid appeared at the door, and, with eyes cast down, and a stiff, respectful courtesy, conveyed the information, "If you please, ma'am, tea is ready."

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This humble, self-abased figure — the utter air of self-abnegation with which the domestic seemed to intimate that, unless her mistress pleased, tea was not ready, and that everything in creation was to be either ready or not ready according to her sovereign will and good pleasure — was to us children a new lesson in decorum.

"Go tell Lady Widgery that tea is served," said Miss Deborah, in a loud, resounding voice. "Tell her that we will wait her ladyship's convenience." The humble serving-maid courtesied, and closed the door softly with reverential awe. On the whole, the impression upon our minds was deeply solemn; we were about to see her ladyship.

Lady Widgery was the last rose of summer of the departed aristocracy. Lady Lothrop's title was only by courtesy; but Sir Thomas Widgery was a live baronet; and as there were to be no more of these splendid dispensations in America, one may fancy the tenderness with which old Tory families cherished the last lingering remnants.

The door was soon opened again, and a bundle of black silk appeared, with a pale, thin face looking out of it. There was to be seen the glitter of a pair of sharp, black eyes, and the shimmer of a thin white hand with a diamond ring upon it. These were the items that made up Lady Widgery, as she dawned upon our childish vision.

Lest the reader should conceive any false hopes or impressions, I may as well say that it turned out, on further acquaintance, that these items were about all there was of Lady Widgery. It was one of the cases where Nature had picked up a very indifferent and commonplace soul, and shut it up in a very intelligent-looking body. From her youth up, Lady Widgery's principal attraction consisted in looking as if there was a great deal more in her than there really was. Her eyes were sparkling and bright, and had a habit of looking at things in this world with keen, shrewd glances, as if she were thinking about them to some pur-

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pose, which she never was. Sometimes they were tender and beseeching, and led her distracted admirers to feel as if she were melting with emotions that she never dreamed of. Thus Lady Widgery had always been rushed for and contended for by the other sex; and one husband had hardly time to be cold in his grave before the air was filled with the rivalry of candidates to her hand; and after all the beautiful little hoax had nothing for it but her attractive soul-case. In her old age she still looked elegant, shrewd, and keen, and undeniably high-bred, and carried about her the prestige of rank and beauty. Otherwise she was a little dry bundle of old prejudices, of faded recollections of past conquests and gayeties, and weakly concerned about her own health, which, in her view and that of everybody about her, appeared a most sacred subject. She had a somewhat entertaining manner of rehearsing the gossip and scandals of the last forty years, and was, so far as such a person could be, religious: that is to say, she kept all the feasts and fasts of the Church scrupulously. She had, in a weakly way, a sense of some responsibility in this matter, because she was Lady Widgery, and because infidelity was prevailing in the land, and it became Lady Widgery to cast her influence against it. Therefore it was that, even at the risk of her precious life, as she thought, she had felt it imperative to come to Boston to celebrate Easter Sunday.

When she entered the room, there was an immediate bustle of welcome. Lady Lothrop ran up to her, saluting her with an appearance of great fondness, mingled, I thought, with a sort of extreme deference. Miss Deborah was pressing in her attentions. "Will you sit a moment before tea to get your feet warm, or will you go out at once? The dining-room is quite warm."

Lady Widgery's feet were quite warm, and everybody was so glad to hear it, that we were filled with wonder.

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Then she turned and fixed her keen, dark eyes on us, as if she were reading our very destiny, and asked who we were. We were all presented circumstantially, and the brilliant eyes seemed to look through us shrewdly, as we made our bows and courtesies. One would have thought that she was studying us with a deep interest, which was not the case.

We were now marshaled out to the tea-table, where we children had our plates put in a row together, and were waited on with obsequious civility by Mrs. Margery and another equally starched and decorous female, who was the attendant of Lady Widgery. We stood at our places a moment, while the lovely old lady, raising her trembling hand, pronounced the words of the customary grace: "For what we are now about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful." Her voice trembled as she spoke, and somehow the impression of fragility and sanctity that she made on me awoke in me a sort of tender awe. When the blessing was over, the maids seated us, and I had leisure to notice the entirely new scene about me.

It was all conducted with an inexpressible stateliness of propriety, and, in an undefined way, the impression was produced upon my mind that the frail, shivery, rather thin and withered little being, enveloped in a tangle of black silk wraps, was something inexpressibly sacred and sublime. Miss Deborah waited on her constantly, pressingly, energetically; and the dear, sweet old white-haired lady tended her with obsequiousness, which, like everything else that she did, was lost in lovingness; and Lady Lothrop, to me the most awe-inspiring of the female race, paled her ineffectual fires, and bowed her sacred head to the rustling little black silk bundle, in a way that made me inwardly wonder. The whole scene was so different from the wide, rough, noisy, free-and-easy democracy of my grandmother's kitchen, that I felt crusted all over with an indefinite stiffness of

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embarrassment, as if I had been dipped in an alum-bath. At the head of the table there was an old silver tea-urn, looking heavy enough to have the weight of whole generations in it, into which, at the moment of sitting down, a serious-visaged waiting-maid dropped a red-hot weight, and forthwith the noise of a violent boiling arose. We little folks looked at each other inquiringly, but said nothing. All was to us like an enchanted palace. The great, mysterious tea-urn, the chased silver tea-caddy, the precise and well-considered movements of Miss Deborah as she rinsed the old embossed silver teapots in the boiling water, the India-china cups and plates, painted with the family initials and family crest, all were to us solemn signs and symbols of that upper table-land of gentility, into which we were forewarned by Aunt Lois we were to enter.

"There," said Miss Deborah, with emphasis, as she poured and handed to Lady Widgery a cup of tea, — "there 's some of the tea that my brother saved at the time of that disgraceful Boston riot, when Boston Harbor was floating with tea-chests. His cargo was rifled in the most scandalous manner, but he went out in a boat and saved some at the risk of his life."

Now my most sacred and enthusiastic remembrance was of the glow of patriotic fervor with which, seated on my grandfather's knee, I had heard the particulars of that event at a time when names and dates and dress, and time, place, and circumstance, had all the life and vividness of a recent transaction. I cannot describe the clarion tones in which Miss Deborah rung out the word *disgraceful*, in connection with an event which had always set my blood boiling with pride and patriotism. Now, as if convicted of sheep-stealing, I felt myself getting red to the very tips of my ears.

"It was a shameful proceeding," sighed Lady Widgery, in her pretty, high-bred tones, as she pensively stirred the

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amber fluid in her teacup. "I never saw Sir Thomas so indignant at anything in all my life, and I 'm sure it gave me a sick-headache for three days, so that I had to stay shut up in a dark room, and could n't keep the least thing on my stomach. What a mysterious providence it is that such conduct should be suffered to lead to success!"

"Well," said Lady Lothrop, sipping her tea on the other side, "clouds and darkness are about the Divine dispensations; but let us hope it will be all finally overruled for the best."

"Oh, come," said Miss Debby, giving a cheerful, victorious crow of defiance from behind her teapots, "Dorothy will be down on us with the tip-end of one of her husband's sermons, of course. Having married a Continental Congress parson, she has to say the best she can; but I, Deborah Kittery, who was never yet in bondage to any man, shall be free to have my say to the end of my days, and I do say that the Continental Congress is an abomination in the land, and the leaders of it, if justice had been done, would all have been hanged high as Haman; and that there is one house in old Boston, at the North End, and not far from the spot where we have the honor to be, where King George now reigns as much as ever he did, and where law and order prevail in spite of General Washington and Mrs. Martha, with her court and train. It puts me out of all manner of patience to read the papers, — receptions to 'em here, there, and everywhere; — I should like to give 'em a reception."

"Come, come, Deborah, my child, you must be patient," said the old lady. "The Lord's ways are not as our ways. He knows what is best."

"I dare say he does, mother; but we know he does let wickedness triumph to an awful extent. I think myself he 's given this country up."

"Let us hope not," said the mother, fervently.

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"Just look at it," said Miss Deborah. "Has not this miserable rebellion broken up the true Church in this country just as it was getting a foothold? has it not shaken hands with French infidelity? Thomas Jefferson is a scoffing infidel, and he drafted their old Declaration of Independence, which, I will say, is the most abominable and blasphemous document that ever sinners dared to sign."

"But General Washington was a Churchman," said Lady Widgery, "and they were always very careful about keeping the feasts and fasts. Why, I remember, in the old times, I have been there to Easter holidays, and we had a splendid ball."

"Well, then, if he was in the true Church, so much the worse for him," said Miss Deborah. "There is some excuse for men of Puritan families, because their ancestors were schismatics and disorganizers to begin with, and came over here because they did n't like to submit to lawful government. For my part, I have always been ashamed of having been born here. If I 'd been consulted, I should have given my voice against it."

"Debby, child, how you do talk!" said the old lady.

"Well, mother, what can I do but talk? and it 's a pity if I should n't be allowed to do that. If I had been a man, I 'd have fought; and, if I could have my way now, I 'd go back to England and live, where there 's some religion and some government."

"I don't see," said the old lady, "but people are doing pretty well under the new government."

"Indeed, mother, how can you know anything about it? There 's a perfect reign of infidelity and immorality begun. Why, look here, in Boston and Cambridge things are going just as you might think they would. The college fellows call themselves D'Alembert, Rousseau, Voltaire, and other French heathen names; and there 's Ellery Davenport!

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just look at him, — came straight down from generations of Puritan ministers, and has n't half as much religion as my cat there; for Tom does know how to order himself lowly and reverently to all his betters."

Here there was such a burst of pleading feminine eloquence on all hands as showed that general interest which often pervades the female breast for some bright, naughty, wicked prodigal son. Lady Widgery and old Mrs. Kittery and Lady Lothrop all spoke at once. "Indeed, Miss Deborah," — "Come, come, Debby," — "You are too bad, — he goes to church with us sometimes."

"To church, does he?" said Miss Debby, with a toss; "and what does he go for? Simply to ogle the girls."

"We should be charitable in our judgments," said Lady Widgery.

"Especially of handsome young men," said Miss Debby, with strong irony. "You all know he does n't believe as much as a heathen. They say he reads and speaks French like a native, and that 's all I want to know of anybody. I 've no opinion of such people; a good honest Christian has no occasion to go out of his own language, and when he does you may be pretty sure it 's for no good."

"Oh, come now, Deborah, you are too sweeping altogether," said Lady Lothrop; "French is of course an elegant accomplishment."

"I never saw any good of the French language, for my part, I must confess," said Miss Debby, "nor, for that matter, of the French nation either; they eat frogs, and break the Sabbath, and are as immoral as the old Canaanites. It 's just exactly like them to aid and abet this unrighteous rebellion. They always hated England, and they take delight in massacres and rebellions, and every kind of mischief, ever since the massacre of St. Bartholomew. Well, well, we shall see what 'll come of these ungodly leveling principles in time. 'All men created free and

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equal,' forsooth. Just think of that! clearly against the church catechism."

"Of course that is all infidelity," said Lady Widgery, confidently. "Sir Thomas used to say it was the effect on the lower classes he dreaded. You see these lower classes are something dreadful; and what 's to keep them down if it is n't religion? as Sir Thomas used to say when he always would go to church Sundays. He felt such a responsibility."

"Well," said Miss Deborah, "you 'll see. I predict we shall see the time when your butcher and your baker and your candlestick-maker will come into your parlor and take a chair as easy as if they were your equals, and every servant-maid will be thinking she must have a silk gown like her mistress. That 's what we shall get by our revolution."

"But let us hope it will be all overruled for good," said Lady Lothrop.

"Oh, overruled, overruled!" said Miss Deborah. "Of course it will be overruled. Sodom and Gomorrah were overruled for good, but 't was a great deal better not to be living there about those times." Miss Debby's voice had got upon so high a key, and her denunciations began to be so terrifying, that the dear old lady interposed.

"Well, children, do let 's love one another, whatever we do," she said; "and, Debby, you must n't talk so hard about Ellery, — he 's your cousin, you know."

"Besides, my dear," said Lady Widgery, "great allowances should be made for his domestic misfortunes."

"I don't see why a man need turn infidel and rebel because his wife has turned out a madwoman," said Miss Debby; "what did he marry her for?"

"Oh my dear, it was a family arrangement to unite the two properties," said Lady Widgery. "You see all the great Pierrepoint estates came in through her, but then she was quite shocking, — very peculiar always, but after

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her marriage her temper was dreadful, — it made poor Ellery miserable, and drove him from home; it really was a mercy when it broke out into real insanity, so that they could shut her up. I 've always had great tenderness for Ellery on that account."

"Of course you have, because you 're a lady. Did I ever know a lady yet that did n't like Ellery Davenport, and was not ready to go to the stake for him? For my part I hate him, because, after all, he humbugs me, and will make me like him in spite of myself. I have to watch and pray against him all the time."

And as if, by the odd law of attraction which has given birth to the proverb that somebody is always nearest when you are talking about him, at this moment the dining-room door was thrown open, and the old man-servant announced "Colonel Ellery Davenport."

"Colonel!" said Miss Debby, with a frown and an accent of contempt. "How often must I tell Hawkins not to use those titles of the old rebel mob army? Insubordination is beginning to creep in, I can see."

These words were lost in the bustle of the entrance of one on whom, after listening to all the past conversation, we children looked with very round eyes of attention. What we saw was a tall, graceful young man, whose air and movements gave a singular impression of both lightness and strength. He carried his head on his shoulders with a jaunty, slightly haughty air, like that of a thorough-bred young horse, and there was quality and breeding in every movement of his body. He was dressed in the imposing and picturesque fashion of those times, with a slight military suggestion in its arrangements. His hair was powdered to a dazzling whiteness, and brushed off his low Greek forehead, and the powder gave that peculiar effect to the eye and complexion which was one of the most distinctive traits of that style of costume. His eyes were of

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a deep violet blue, and of that lively, flashing brilliancy which a painter could only represent by double lights. They seemed to throw out light like diamonds. He entered the room bowing and smiling with the gay good-humor of one sure of pleasing. An inspiring sort of cheerfulness came in with him, that seemed to illuminate the room like a whole stream of sunshine. In short, he fully justified all Miss Deborah's fears.

In a moment he had taken a rapid survey of the party; he had kissed the hand of the dear old lady; he had complimented Lady Widgery; he had inquired with effusion after the health of Parson Lothrop, and ended all by an adroit attempt to kiss Miss Deborah's hand, which earned him a smart little cuff from that wary belligerent.

"No rebels allowed on these premises," said Miss Debby, sententiously.

"On my soul, cousin, you forget that peace has been declared," he said, throwing himself into a chair with a *nonchalant* freedom.

"Peace! not in our house. I haven't surrendered, if Lord Cornwallis has," said Miss Debby, "and I consider you as the enemy."

"Well, Debby, we must love our enemies," said the old lady, in a pleading tone.

"Certainly you must," he replied quickly; "and here I've come to Boston on purpose to go to church with you to-morrow."

"That's right, my boy," said the old lady. "I always knew you'd come into right ways at last."

"Oh, there are hopes of me, certainly," he said; "if the gentler sex will only remember their mission, and be guardian angels, I think I shall be saved in the end."

"You mean that you are going to wait on pretty Lizzie Cabot to church to-morrow," said Miss Debby; "that's about all the religion there is in it."

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"Mine is the religion of beauty, fair cousin," said he. "If I had had the honor of being one of the apostles, I should have put at least one article to that effect into our highly respectable creed."

"Ellery Davenport, you are a scoffer."

"What, I? because I believe in the beautiful? What is goodness but beauty? and what is sin but bad taste? I could prove it to you out of my grandfather Edwards's works, *passim*, and I think nobody in New England would dispute him."

"I don't know anything about him," said Miss Debby, with a toss. "He was n't in the Church."

"Mere matter of position, cousin. Could n't very well be when the Church was a thousand miles across the water; but he lived and died a stanch loyalist, — an aristocrat in the very marrow of his bones, as anybody may see. The whole of his system rests on the undisputed right of big folks to eat up little folks in proportion to their bigness, and the Creator, being biggest of all, is dispensed from all obligation to seek anything but his own glory. Here you have the root-doctrine of the divine right of kings and nobles, who have only to follow their Maker's example in their several spheres, as his blessed Majesty King George has of late been doing with his American colonies. If he had got the treatise on true virtue by heart, he could not have carried out its principles better."

"Well, now, I never knew that there was so much good in President Edwards before," said Lady Widgery, with simplicity. "I must get my maid, to read me that treatise some time."

"Do, madam," said Ellery. "I think you will find it exactly adapted to your habits of thought, and extremely soothing."

"It will be a nice thing for her to read me to sleep with," said Lady Widgery, innocently.

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"By all means," said Ellery, with an indescribable mocking light in his great blue eyes.

For my own part, having that strange, vibrating susceptibility of constitution which I have described as making me peculiarly impressible by the moral sphere of others, I felt in the presence of this man a singular and painful contest of attraction and repulsion, such as one might imagine to be produced by the near approach of some beautiful but dangerous animal. His singular grace and brilliancy awoke in me an undefined antagonism akin to antipathy, and yet, as if under some enchantment, I could not keep my eyes off from him, and eagerly listened to everything that he had to say.

With that quick insight into human nature which enabled him, as by a sort of instinct, to catch the reflex of every impression which he made on any human being, he surveyed the row of wide-open, wondering, admiring eyes, which followed him at our end of the table.

"Aha, what have we here?" he said, as he advanced and laid his hand on my head. I shuddered and shook it off with a feeling of pain and dislike amounting to hatred.

"How now, my little man?" he said; "what's the matter here?" and then he turned to Tina. "Here's a little lady will be more gracious, I know," and he stooped and attempted to kiss her.

The little lady drew her head back and repulsed him with the dignity of a young princess.

"Upon my word," he said, "we learn the tricks of our trade early, don't we? Pardon me, petite mademoiselle," he said as he retreated, laughing. "So you don't like to be kissed?"

"Only by proper persons," said Tina, with that demure gravity which she could at times so whimsically assume, but sending with the words a long mischievous flash from under her downcast eyelashes.

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"Upon my word, if there is n't one that 's perfect in Mother Eve's catechism at an early age," said Ellery Davenport. "Young lady, I hope for a better acquaintance with you one of these days."

"Come, Ellery, let the child alone," said Miss Debby; "why should you be teaching all the girls to be forward? If you notice her so much she will be vain."

"That 's past praying for, anyhow," said he, looking with admiration at the dimpling, sparkling face of Tina, who evidently was dying to answer him back. "Don't you see the monkey has her quiver full of arrows?" he said. "Do let her try her infant hand on me."

But Miss Debby, eminently proper, rose immediately, and broke up the tea-table session by proposing adjournment to the parlor.

After this we had family prayers, the maid-servants and man-servant being called in and ranged in decorous order on a bench that stood prepared for exactly that occasion in a corner of the room. Miss Deborah placed a stand, with a great quarto edition of the Bible and prayer-book, before her mother, and the old lady read in a trembling voice the psalm, the epistle, and the gospel for Easter eve, and then, all kneeling, the evening prayers. The sound of her tremulous voice, and the beauty of the prayers themselves, which I vaguely felt, impressed me so much that I wept, without knowing why, as one sometimes does at plaintive music. One thing in particular filled me with a solemn surprise and that was the prayers, which I had never heard before, for "The Royal Family of England." The trembling voice rose to fervent clearness on the words, "We beseech Thee, with Thy favor, to behold our most Sovereign Lord, King George, and so replenish him with the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, that he may always incline to Thy will, and walk in Thy way. Endue him plenteously with heavenly gifts, grant him in health and wealth long to live, strengthen

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him that he may vanquish and overcome all his enemies, and finally after this life may attain everlasting joy and felicity, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The loud "Amen" from Miss Debby which followed this, heartily chorused as it was by the well-taught man-servant and maid-servants, might have done any king's heart good. For my part, I was lost in astonishment; and when the prayer followed "for the gracious Queen Charlotte, their Royal Highnesses, George, Prince of Wales, the Princess Dowager of Wales, and all the Royal Family," my confusion of mind was at its height. All these unknown personages were to be endued with the Holy Spirit, enriched with heavenly grace, and brought to an everlasting kingdom, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. I must confess that all I had heard of them previously, in my education, had not prepared me to see the propriety of any peculiar celestial arrangements in their favor; but the sweet and solemn awe inspired by the trembling voice which pleaded went a long way towards making me feel as if there must have been a great mistake in my bringing up hitherto.

When the circle rose from their knees, Ellery Davenport said to Miss Debby, "It's a pity the king of England couldn't know what stanch supporters he has in Boston."

"I don't see," said the old lady, "why they won't let us have that prayer read in churches now; it can't do any harm."

"I don't, either," said Ellery. "For my part, I don't know any one who needs praying for more than the King of England; but the prayers of the Church don't appear to have been answered in his case. If he had been in the slightest degree 'endued with heavenly gifts,' he need n't have lost these American colonies."

"Come, Ellery, none of your profane talk," said Miss Debby; "you don't believe in anything good."

"On the contrary, I always insist on seeing the good

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before I believe; I should believe in prayer, if I saw any good come from it."

"For shame, Ellery, when children are listening to you!" said Miss Debby. "But come, my little folks," she added, rising briskly, "it 's time for these little eyes to be shut."

The dear old lady called us all to her, and kissed us "good-night," laying her hand gently on our heads as she did so. I felt the peaceful influence of that hand go through me like music, and its benediction even in my dreams.

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CHAPTER XXV

EASTER SUNDAY

For a marvel, even in the stormy clime of Boston, our Easter Sunday was one of those celestial days which seem, like the New Jerusalem of the Revelation, to come straight down from God out of heaven, to show us mortals what the upper world may be like. Our poor old Mother Boston has now and then such a day given to her, even in the uncertain spring-time; and when all her bells ring together, and the old North Church chimes her solemn psalm-tunes, and all the people in their holiday garments come streaming out towards the churches of every name which line her streets, it seems as if the venerable dead on Copp's Hill must dream pleasantly, for "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord," and even to this day, in dear old Boston, their works do follow them.

At an early hour we were roused, and dressed ourselves with the most anxious and exemplary care. For the first time in my life I looked anxiously in the looking-glass, and scanned with some solicitude, as if it had been a third person, the little being who called himself "I." I saw a pair of great brown eyes, a face rather thin and pale, a high forehead, and a great profusion of dark curls, — the combing out of which, by the by, was one of the morning trials of my life. In vain Aunt Lois had cut them off repeatedly, in the laudable hope that my hair would grow out straight. It seemed a more inextricable mat at each shearing; but as Harry's flaxen poll had the same peculiarity, we consoled each other, while we labored at our morning toilet.

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Down in the sunny parlor, a little before breakfast was on the table, we walked about softly with our hands behind us, lest Satan, who we were assured had always some mischief still for idle hands to do, should entice us into touching some of the many curious articles which we gazed upon now for the first time. There was the picture of a very handsome young man over the mantel-piece, and beneath it hung a soldier's sword in a large loop of black crape, a significant symbol of the last great sorrow which had overshadowed the household. On one side of the door, framed and glazed, was a large coat of arms of the Kittery family, worked in chenille and embroidery, — the labor of Miss Deborah's hands during the course of her early education. In other places on the walls hung oil paintings of the deceased master of the mansion, and of the present venerable mistress, as she was in the glow of early youth. They were evidently painted by a not unskillful hand, and their eyes always following us as we moved about the room gave us the impression of being overlooked, even while as yet there was nobody else in the apartment. Conspicuously hung on one side of the room was a copy of one of the Vandyck portraits of Charles the First, with his lace ruff and peaked beard. Underneath this was a printed document, framed and glazed; and I, who was always drawn to read anything that could be read, stationed myself opposite to it and began reading aloud: —

"The Twelve Good Rules of the Most Blessed Martyr, King Charles First, of Blessed Memory."

I was reading these in a loud, clear voice, when Miss Debby entered the room. She stopped and listened to me, with a countenance beaming with approbation.

"Go on, sonny!" she said, coming up behind me, with an approving nod, when I blushed and stopped on seeing her. "Read them through; those are good rules for a man to form his life by."

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I wish I could remember now what these so highly praised rules were. The few that I can recall are not especially in accordance with the genius of our modern times. They began: —

"1st. Profane no Divine Ordinances.

"2d. Touch no State Matter.

"3d. Pick no Quarrels.

"4th. Maintain no ill Opinions."

Here my memory fails me, but I remember that, stimulated by Miss Deborah's approbation, I did commit the whole of them to memory at the time, and repeated them with a readiness and fluency which drew upon me warm commendations from the dear old lady, and in fact from all in the house, though Ellery Davenport did shrug his shoulders contumaciously and give a sort of suppressed whistle of dissent.

"If we had minded those rules," he said, "we should n't be where we are now."

"No, indeed, you would n't; the more 's the pity you did n't," said Miss Debby. "If I 'd had the bringing of you up, you should be learning things like that, instead of trumpery French and democratic nonsense."

"Speaking of French," said Ellery, "I declare I forgot a package of gloves that I brought over especially for you and Aunty here, — the very best of Paris kid."

"You may spare yourself the trouble of bringing them, cousin," said Miss Deborah, coldly. "Whatever others may do, I trust I never shall be left to put a French glove on *my* hands. They may be all very fine, no doubt, but English gloves, made under her Majesty's sanction, will always be good enough for me."

"Oh, well, in that case I shall have the honor of presenting them to Lady Lothrop, unless her principles should be equally rigid."

"I dare say Dorothy will take them," said Miss Debo-

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rah. "When a woman has married a Continental parson, what can you expect of her? but, for *my* part, I should feel that I dishonored the house of the Lord to enter it with gloves on made by those atheistical French people. The fact is, we must put a stop to worldly conformities somewhere."

"And you draw the line at French gloves," said Ellery.

"No, indeed," said Miss Deborah; "by no means French gloves. French novels, French philosophy, and, above all, French morals, or rather want of morals, — *these* are what I go against, Cousin Ellery."

So saying, Miss Debby led the way to the breakfast-table, with an air of the most martial and determined moral principle.

I remember only one other incident of that morning before we went to church. The dear old lady had seemed sensibly affected by the levity with which Ellery Davenport generally spoke upon sacred subjects, and disturbed by her daughter's confident assertions of his infidel sentiments. So she administered to him an admonition in her own way. A little before church-time she was sitting on the sofa, reading in her great Bible spread out on the table before her.

"Ellery," she said, "come here and sit down by me. I want you to read me this text."

"Certainly, Aunty, by all means," he said, as he seated himself by her, bent his handsome head over the book, and, following the lead of her trembling finger, read: —

"And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee, but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever."

"Ellery," she said, with trembling earnestness, "think of that, my boy. O Ellery, remember!"

He turned and kissed her hand, and there certainly were

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tears in his eyes. "Aunty," he said, "you must pray for me; I may be a good boy one of these days, who knows?"

There was no more preaching, and no more said; she only held his hand, looked lovingly at him, and stroked his forehead. "There have been a great many good people among your fathers, Ellery."

"I know it," he said.

At this moment Miss Debby came in with the summons to church. The family carriage came round for the old lady, but we were better pleased to walk up the street under convoy of Ellery Davenport, who made himself quite delightful to us. Tina obstinately refused to take his hand, and insisted upon walking only with Harry, though from time to time she cast glances at him over her shoulder, and he called her "a little chip of mother Eve's block," — at which she professed to feel great indignation.

The reader may remember my description of our meeting-house at Oldtown, and therefore will not wonder that the architecture of the Old North and its solemn-sounding chimes, though by no means remarkable compared with European churches, appeared to us a vision of wonder. We gazed with delighted awe at the chancel and the altar, with their massive draperies of crimson looped back with heavy gold cord and tassels, and revealing a cloud of little winged cherubs, whereat Tina's eyes grew large with awe, as if she had seen a vision. Above this there was a mystical Hebrew word emblazoned in a golden halo, while around the galleries of the house were marvelous little colored statuettes of angels blowing long golden trumpets. These figures had been taken from a privateer and presented to the church by a British man-of-war, and no child that saw them would ever forget them. Then there was the organ, whose wonderful sounds were heard by me for the first time in my life. There was also an indefinable impression of stately people that worshiped there. They

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all seemed to me like Lady Lothrop, rustling in silks and brocades; with gentlemen like Captain Brown, in scarlet cloaks and powdered hair. Not a crowded house by any means, but a well-ordered and select few, who performed all the responses and evolutions of the service with immaculate propriety. I was struck with every one's kneeling and bowing the head on taking a seat in the church; even gay Ellery Davenport knelt down and hid his face in his hat, though what he did it for was a matter of some speculation with us afterward. Miss Debby took me under her special supervision. She gave me a prayer-book, found the places for me, and took me up and down with her through the whole service, giving her responses in such loud, clear, and energetic tones as entirely to acquit herself of her share of responsibility in the matter. The "true Church" received no detriment, so far as she was concerned. I was most especially edified and astonished by the deep courtesies which she and several distinguished-looking ladies made at the name of the Saviour in the Creed; so much so, that she was obliged to tap me on the head to indicate to me my own part in that portion of the Church service.

I was surprised to observe that Harry appeared perfectly familiar with the ceremony; and Lady Lothrop, who had him under her particular surveillance, looked on with wonder and approbation, as he quietly opened his prayer-book and went through the service with perfect regularity. Tina, who stood between Ellery Davenport and the old lady, seemed, to tell the truth, much too conscious of the amused attention with which he was regarding her little movements, notwithstanding the kindly efforts of her venerable guardian to guide her through the service. She resolutely refused to allow him to assist her, half-turning her back upon him, but slyly watching him from under her long eyelashes, in a way that afforded him great amusement.

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The sermon which followed the prayers was of the most droning and sleepy kind. But as it was dispensed by a regularly ordained successor of the Apostles, Miss Deborah, though ordinarily the shrewdest and sharpest of womankind, and certainly capable of preaching a sermon far more to the point herself, sat bolt upright and listened to all those slumberous platitudes with the most reverential attention.

It yet remains a mystery to my mind, how a church which retains such a stimulating and inspiring liturgy *could* have such drowsy preaching, — how men could go through with the "Te Deum," and the "Gloria in Excelsis," without one thrill of inspiration, or one lift above the dust of earth, and, after uttering words which one would think might warm the frozen heart of the very dead, settle sleepily down into the quietest commonplace. Such, however, has been the sin of ritualism in all days, principally because human nature is, above all things, lazy, and needs to be thorned and goaded up those heights where it ought to fly.

Harry and I both had a very nice little nap during sermon-time, while Ellery Davenport made a rabbit of his pocket-handkerchief by way of paying his court to Tina, who sat shyly giggling and looking at him.

After the services came the Easter dinner, to which, as a great privilege, we were admitted from first to last; although children in those days were held to belong strictly to the dessert, and only came in with the nuts and raisins. I remember Ellery Davenport seemed to be the life of the table, and kept everybody laughing. He seemed particularly fond of rousing up Miss Debby to those rigorous and energetic statements concerning Church and King which she delivered with such freedom.

"I don't know how we are any of us to get to heaven now," he said to Miss Debby. "Supposing I wanted to be confirmed, there is n't a bishop in America."

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"Well, don't you think they will send one over?" said Lady Widgery, with a face of great solicitude.

"Two, madam; it would take two in order to start the succession in America. The apostolic electricity cannot come down through one."

"I heard that Dr. Franklin was negotiating with the Archbishop of Canterbury," said Lady Lothrop.

"Yes, but they are not in the best humor toward us over there," said Ellery. "You know what Franklin wrote back, don't you?"

"No," said Lady Widgery; "what was it?"

"Well, you see, he found Canterbury & Co. rather huffy, and somewhat on the high-and-mighty order with him, and, being a democratic American, he did n't like it. So he wrote over that he did n't see, for his part, why anybody that wanted to preach the Gospel could n't preach it, without sending a thousand miles across the water to ask leave of a cross old gentleman at Canterbury."

A shocked expression went round the table, and Miss Debby drew herself up.

"That 's what I call a profane remark, Ellery Davenport," she said.

"I did n't make it, you understand."

"No, dear, you did n't," said the old lady. "Of course you would n't say such a thing."

"Of course I should n't, Aunty, — Oh no! I 'm only concerned to know how I shall be confirmed, if ever I want to be. Do you think there really is no other way to heaven, Miss Debby? Now, if the Archbishop of Canterbury won't repent, and I do, — if he won't send a bishop, and I become a good Christian, — don't you think now the Church might open the door a little crack for me?"

"Why, of course, Ellery," said Lady Lothrop. "We believe that many good people will be saved out of the Church."

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"My dear madam, that 's because you married a Congregational parson; you are getting illogical."

"Ellery, you know better," said Miss Debby, vigorously. "You know we hold that many good persons out of the Church are saved, though they are saved by uncovenanted mercies. There are no direct promises to any but those in the Church; they have no authorized ministry or sacraments."

"What a dreadful condition these American colonies are in!" said Ellery; "it 's a result of our Revolution which never struck me before."

"You can sneer as much as you please, it 's a solemn fact, Ellery; it 's the chief mischief of this dreadful rebellion."

"Come, come, children," said the old lady; "let 's talk about something else. We 've been to the communion, and heard about 'peace on earth and good-will to men.' I always think of our blessed King George every time I take the communion wine out of those cups that he gave to our church."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Debby; "it will be a long time before you get the American Congress to giving communion services, like our good, pious King George."

"It 's a pity pious folks are so apt to be pig-headed," said Ellery, in a tone just loud enough to stir up Miss Debby, but not to catch the ear of the old lady.

"I suppose there never was such a pious family as our royal family," said Lady Widgery. "I have been told that Queen Charlotte reads prayers with her maids regularly every night, and we all know how our blessed King read prayers beside a dying cottager."

"I do not know what the reason is," said Ellery Davenport, reflectively, "but political tyrants as a general thing are very pious men. The worse their political actions are, the more they pray. Perhaps it is on the principle of

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compensation, just as animals that are incapacitated from helping themselves in one way have some corresponding organ in another direction."

"I agree with you that kings are generally religious," said Lady Widgery, "and you must admit that, if monarchy makes men religious, it is an argument in its favor, because there is nothing so important as religion, you know."

"The argument, madam, is a profound one, and does credit to your discernment; but the question now is, since it has pleased Providence to prosper rebellion, and allow a community to be founded without any true church, or any means of getting at true ordinances and sacraments, what young fellows like us are to do about it."

"I 'll tell you, Ellery," said the old lady, laying hold of his arm. "'Know the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind,' and everything will come right."

"But, even then, I could n't belong to 'the true Church,'" said Ellery.

"You 'd belong to the church of all good people," said the old lady, "and that 's the main thing."

"Aunty, you are always right," he said.

Now I listened with the sharpest attention to all this conversation, which was as bewildering to me as all the rest of the scenery and surroundings of this extraordinary visit had been.

Miss Debby's martial and declaratory air, the vigorous faith in her statements which she appeared to have, were quite a match, it seemed to me, for similar statements of a contrary nature which I had heard from my respected grandmother; and I could n't help wondering in my own mind what strange concussions of the elementary powers would result if ever these two should be brought together. To use a modern figure, it would be like the meeting of

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two full-charged railroad engines, from opposite directions, on the same track.

After dinner, in the evening, instead of the usual service of family prayers, Miss Debby catechised her family in a vigorous and determined manner. We children went and stood up with the row of men and maid-servants, and Harry proved to have a very good knowledge of the catechism, but Tina and I only compassed our answers by repeating them after Miss Debby; and she applied herself to teaching us as if this were the only opportunity of getting the truth we were ever to have in our lives.

In fact, Miss Debby made a current of electricity that, for the time being, carried me completely away, and I exerted myself to the utmost to appear well before her, especially as I had gathered from Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah's conversations, that whatever went on in this mansion belonged strictly to upper circles of society, dimly known and revered. American democracy had not in those days become a practical thing, so as to outgrow the result of generations of reverence for the upper classes. And the man-servant and the maid-servants seemed so humble, and Miss Debby so victorious and dominant, that I could n't help feeling what a grand thing the true Church must be, and find growing in myself the desires of a submissive catechumen. As to the catechism itself, I don't recollect that I thought one moment what a word of it meant, I was so absorbed and busy in the mere effort of repeating it after Miss Debby's rapid dictation.

The only comparison I remember to have made with that which I had been accustomed to recite in school every Saturday respected the superior ease of answering the first question; which required me, instead of relating in metaphysical terms what "man's chief end" was in time and eternity, to give a plain statement of what my own name was on this mortal earth.

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The first question, as being easiest, was put to Tina, who dimpled and colored and flashed out of her eyes, as she usually did when addressed, looked shyly across at Ellery Davenport, who sat with an air of negligent amusement contemplating the scene, and then answered with sufficient precision and distinctness, "Eglantine Percival."

He gave a little start, as if some sudden train of recollection had been awakened, and looked at her with intense attention; and when Ellery Davenport fixed his attention upon anybody, there was so much fire and electricity in his eyes that they seemed to be felt, even at a distance; and I saw that Tina constantly colored and giggled, and seemed so excited that she scarcely knew what she was saying, till at last Miss Debby, perceiving this, turned sharp round upon him, and said, "Ellery Davenport, if you have n't any religion yourself, I wish you would n't interrupt my instructions."

"Bless my soul, cousin! what was I doing? I have been sitting here still as a mouse; but I 'll turn my back, and read a good book;" — and round he turned, accordingly, till the catechising was finished.

When it was all over, and the servants had gone out, we grouped ourselves around the fire, and Ellery Davenport began: "Cousin Debby, I 'm going to come down handsomely to you. I admit that your catechism is much better for children than the one I was brought up on. I was well drilled in the formulas of the celebrated Assembly of *dry*vines of Westminster, and dry enough I found it. Now it 's a true proverb, 'Call a man a thief, and he 'll steal;' 'give a dog a bad name, and he 'll bite you;' tell a child that he is 'a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven,' and he feels, to say the least, civilly disposed towards religion; tell him 'he is under God's wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and the pains

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of hell forever,' because somebody ate an apple five thousand years ago, and his religious associations are not so agreeable, — especially if he has the answers whipped into him, or has to go to bed without his supper for not learning them."

"You poor dear!" said the old lady; "did they send you to bed without your supper? They ought to have been whipped themselves, every one of them."

"Well, you see, I was a little fellow when my parents died, and brought up under brother Jonathan, who was the bluest kind of blue; and he was so afraid that I should mistake my naturally sweet temper for religion, that he instructed me daily that I was a child of wrath, and could n't, and did n't, and never should do one right thing till I was regenerated, and when that would happen no mortal knew; so I thought, as my account was going to be scored off at that time, it was no matter if I did run up a pretty long one; so I lied and stole whenever it came handy."

"O Ellery, I hope not!" said the old lady; "certainly you never stole anything!"

"Have, though, my blessed aunt, — robbed orchards and watermelon patches; but then St. Augustine did that very thing himself, and he did n't turn about till he was thirty years old, and I 'm a good deal short of that yet; so you see there is a great chance for me."

"Ellery, why don't you come into the true Church?" said Miss Debby. "That 's what you need."

"Well," said Ellery, "I must confess that I like the idea of a nice old motherly Church, that sings to us, and talks to us, and prays with us, and takes us in her lap and coddles us when we are sick and says, —

'Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber.'

Nothing would suit me better, if I could get my reason to sleep; but the mischief of a Calvinistic education is, it

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wakes up your reason, and it never will go to sleep again, and you can't take a pleasant humbug if you would. Now, in this life, where nobody knows anything about anything, a capacity for humbugs would be a splendid thing to have. I wish to my heart I'd been brought up a Roman Catholic! but I have not, — I've been brought up a Calvinist, and so here I am."

"But if you'd try to come into the Church and believe," said Miss Debby, energetically, "grace would be given you. You've been baptized, and the Church admits your baptism. Now just assume your position."

Miss Debby spoke with such zeal and earnestness, that I, whom she was holding in her lap, looked straight across with the expectation of hearing Ellery Davenport declare his immediate conversion then and there. I shall never forget the expression of his face. There was first a flash of amusement, as he looked at Miss Debby's strong, sincere face, and then it faded into something between admiration and pity; and then he said to himself in a musing tone: "I a 'member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.'" And then a strange, sarcastic expression broke over his face, as he added: "Could n't do it, cousin; not exactly my style. Besides, I should n't be much of a credit to any church, and whichever catches me would be apt to find a shark in the net. You see," he added, jumping up and walking about rapidly, "I have the misfortune to have an extremely exacting nature, and, if I set out to be religious at all, it would oblige me to carry the thing to as great lengths as did my grandfather Jonathan Edwards. I should have to take up the cross and all that, and I don't want to, and don't mean to; and as to all these pleasant, comfortable churches, where a fellow can get to heaven without it, I have the misfortune of not being able to believe in them; so there you see precisely my situation."

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"These horrid old Calvinistic doctrines," said Miss Debby, "are the ruin of children."

"My dear, they are all in the Thirty-nine Articles as strong as in the Cambridge platform, and all the other platforms, for the good reason that John Calvin himself had the overlooking of them. And, what is worse, there is an abominable sight of truth in them. Nature herself is a high Calvinist, old jade; and there never was a man of energy enough to feel the force of the world he deals with that was n't a predestinarian, from the time of the Greek Tragedians down to the time of Oliver Cromwell, and ever since. The hardest doctrines are the things that a fellow sees with his own eyes going on in the world around him. If you had been in England, as I have, where the true Church prevails, you 'd see that pretty much the whole of the lower classes there are predestinated to be conceived and born in sin, and shapen in iniquity; and come into the world in such circumstances that to expect even decent morality of them is expecting what is contrary to all reason. This is your Christian country, after eighteen hundred years' experiment of Christianity. The elect, by whom I mean the bishops and clergy and upper classes, have attained to a position in which a decent and religious life is practicable, and where there is leisure from the claims of the body to attend to those of the soul. These, however, to a large extent are smothering in their own fat, or, as your service to-day had it, 'Their heart is fat as brawn,' and so they don't, to any great extent, make their calling and election sure. Then, as for heathen countries, they are a peg below those of Christianity. Taking the mass of human beings in the world at this hour, they are in such circumstances, that, so far from its being reasonable to expect the morals of Christianity of them, they are not within sight of ordinary human decencies. Talk of purity of heart to a Malay or Hottentot! Why, the doc-

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trine of a clean shirt is an uncomprehended mystery to more than half the human race at this moment. That 's what I call visible election and reprobation, get rid of it as we may or can."

"Positively, Ellery, I am not going to have you talk so before these children," said Miss Debby, getting up and ringing the bell energetically. "This all comes of the vile democratic idea that people are to have opinions on all subjects, instead of believing what the Church tells them; and, as you say, it 's Calvinism that starts people out to be always reasoning and discussing and having opinions. I hate folks who are always speculating and thinking, and having new doctrines; all I want to know is *my duty*, and to do it. I want to know what *my* part is, and it 's none of my business whether the bishops and the kings and the nobility do theirs or not, if I only do mine. 'To do my duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call me,' is all I want, and I think it is all anybody need want."

"Amen!" said Ellery Davenport, "and so be it."

Here Mrs. Margery appeared with the candles to take us to bed.

In bidding our adieus for the night, it was customary for good children to kiss all around; but Tina, in performing this ceremony both this night and the night before, resolutely ignored Ellery Davenport, notwithstanding his earnest petitions; and, while she would kiss with ostentatious affection those on each side of him, she hung her head and drew back whenever he attempted the familiarity, yet, by way of reparation, turned back at the door as she was going out, and made him a parting salutation with the air of a princess; and I heard him say, "Upon my word, how she does it!"

After we left the room (this being a particular which, like tellers of stories in general, I learned from other

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sources), he turned to Lady Lothrop and said: "Did I understand that she said her name was Eglantine Percival, and that she is a sort of foundling?"

"Certainly," said Lady Lothrop; "both these children are orphans, left on the parish by a poor woman who died in a neighboring town. They appear to be of good blood and breeding, but we have no means of knowing who they are."

"Well," said Ellery Davenport, "I knew a young English officer by the name of Percival, who was rather a graceless fellow. He once visited me at my country-seat, with several others. When he went away, being, as he often was, not very fit to take care of himself, he dropped and left a pocket-book, so some of the servants told me, which was thrown into one of the drawers, and for aught I know may be there now: it's just barely possible that it may be, and that there may be some papers in it which will shed light on these children's parentage. If I recollect rightly, he was said to be connected with a good English family, and it might be possible, if we were properly informed, to shame him, or frighten him into doing something for these children. I will look into the matter myself, when I am in England next winter, where I shall have some business; that is to say, if we can get any clue. The probability is that the children are illegitimate."

"Oh, I hope not," said Lady Lothrop; "they appear to have been so beautifully educated."

"Well," said Ellery Davenport, "he may have seduced his curate's daughter: that's a very simple supposition. At any rate, he never produced her in society, never spoke of her, kept her in cheap, poor lodgings in the country, and the general supposition was that she was his mistress, not his wife."

"No," said a little voice near his elbow, which startled every one in the room, — "no, Mr. Davenport, my mother was my father's wife."

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The fire had burnt low, and the candles had not been brought in, and Harry, who had been sent back by Mrs. Margery to give a message as to the night arrangements, had entered the room softly, and stood waiting to get a chance to deliver it. He now came forward, and stood trembling with agitation, pale yet bold. Of course all were very much shocked as he went on: "They took my mother's wedding-ring, and sold it to pay for her coffin; but she always wore it and often told me when it was put on. But," he added, "she told me, the night she died, that I had no father but God."

"And he is Father enough!" said the old lady, who, entirely broken down and overcome, clasped the little boy in her arms. "Never you mind it, dear, God certainly will take care of you."

"I know he will," said the boy, with solemn simplicity; "but I want you all to believe the truth about my mother."

It was characteristic of that intense inwardness and delicacy which were so peculiar in Harry's character, that, when he came back from this agitating scene, he did not tell me a word of what had occurred, nor did I learn it till years afterwards. I was very much in the habit of lying awake nights, long after he had sunk into untroubled slumbers, and this night I remember that he lay long but silently awake, so very still and quiet, that it was some time before I discovered that he was not sleeping.

The next day Ellery Davenport left us, but we remained to see the wonders of Boston. I remembered my grandmother's orders, and went on to Copp's Hill, and to the old Granary burying-ground, to see the graves of the saints, and read the inscriptions. I had a curious passion for this sort of mortuary literature, even as a child, — a sort of nameless, weird, strange delight, — so that I accomplished this part of my grandmother's wishes *con amore*.

Boston in those days had not even arrived at being

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a city, but, as the reader may learn from contemporary magazines, was known as the Town of Boston. In some respects, however, it was even more attractive in those days for private residences than it is at present. As is the case now in some of our large rural towns, it had many stately old houses, which stood surrounded by gardens and grounds, where fruits and flowers were tended with scrupulous care. It was sometimes called "the garden town." The house of Madam Kittery stood on a high eminence overlooking the sea, and had connected with it a stately garden, which, just at the time of year I speak of, was gay with the first crocuses and snowdrops.

In the eyes of the New England people, it was always a sort of mother-town, — a sacred city, the shrine of that religious enthusiasm which founded the States of New England. There were the graves of her prophets and her martyrs, — those who had given their lives through the hardships of that enterprise in so ungenial a climate.

On Easter Monday Lady Lothrop proposed to take us all to see the shops and sights of Boston, with the bountiful intention of purchasing some few additions to the children's wardrobes. I was invited to accompany the expedition, and all parties appeared not a little surprised, and somewhat amused, that I preferred, instead of this lively tour among the living, to spend my time in a lonely ramble in the Copp's Hill burying-ground.

I returned home after an hour or two spent in this way, and found the parlor deserted by all except dear old Madam Kittery. I remember, even now, the aspect of that sunny room, and the perfect picture of peace and love that she seemed to me, as she sat on the sofa with a table full of books drawn up to her, placidly reading.

She called me to her as soon as I came in, and would have me get on the sofa by her. She stroked my head, and looked lovingly at me, and called me "Sonny," till

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my whole heart opened toward her as a flower opens toward the sunshine.

Among all the loves that man has to woman, there is none so sacred and saint-like as that toward these dear, white-haired angels, who seem to form the connecting link between heaven and earth, who have lived to get the victory over every sin and every sorrow, and live perpetually on the banks of the dark river, in that bright, calm land of Beulah, where angels daily walk to and fro, and sounds of celestial music are heard across the water. Such have no longer personal cares, or griefs, or sorrows. The tears of life have all been shed, and therefore they have hearts at leisure to attend to every one else. Even the sweet, guileless childishness that comes on in this period has a sacred dignity; it is a seal of fitness for that heavenly kingdom which whosoever shall not receive as a little child, shall not enter therein.

Madam Kittery, with all her apparent simplicity, had a sort of simple shrewdness. She delighted in reading, and some of the best classical literature was always lying on her table. She began questioning me about my reading, and asking me to read to her, and seemed quite surprised at the intelligence and expression with which I did it.

I remember, in the course of the reading, coming across a very simple Latin quotation, at which she stopped me. "There," said she, "is one of those Latin streaks that always trouble me in books, because I can't tell what they mean. When George was alive, he used to read them to me."

Now, as this was very simple, I felt myself quite adequate to its interpretation, and gave it with a readiness which pleased her.

"Why! how came you to know Latin?" she said.

Then my heart opened, and I told her all my story, and how my poor father had always longed to go to college,

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"and died without the sight," and how he had begun to teach me Latin; but how he was dead, and my mother was poor, and grandpapa could only afford to keep Uncle Bill in college, and there was no way for me to go, and Aunt Lois wanted to bind me out to a shoemaker. And then I began to cry, as I always did when I thought of this.

I shall never forget the overflowing, motherly sympathy which had made it easy for me to tell all this to one who, but a few hours before, had been a stranger; nor how she comforted me, and cheered me, and insisted upon it that I should immediately eat a piece of cake, and begged me not to trouble myself about it, and she would talk to Debby, and something should be done.

Now I had not the slightest idea of what Madam Kittery could do in the situation, but I was exceedingly strengthened and consoled, and felt sure that there had come a favorable turn in my fortunes; and the dear old lady and myself forthwith entered into a league of friendship. I was thus emboldened, now that we were all alone, and Miss Debby far away, to propound to her indulgent ear certain political doubts, raised by the conflict of my past education with the things I had been hearing for the last day or two.

"If King George was such a good man, what made him oppress the Colonies so?" said I.

"Why, dear, he did n't," she said, earnestly. "That 's all a great mistake. Our King is a dear, pious, good man, and wished us all well, and was doing just the best for us he knew how."

"Then was it because he did n't know how to govern us?" said I.

"My dear, you know the King can do no wrong; it was his ministers, if anybody. I don't know exactly how it was, but they got into a brangle, and everything went wrong; and then there was so much evil feeling and fight-

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ing and killing, and 'there was confusion, and every evil work.' There 's my poor boy," she said, pointing to the picture with a trembling hand, and to the sword hanging in its crape loop, — "he died for his King, doing his duty in that state of life in which it pleased God to call him. I must n't be sorry for that, but oh, I wish there had n't been any war, and we could have had it all peaceful, and George could have stayed with us. I don't see, either, the use of all these new-fangled notions, but then I try to love everybody, and hope for the best."

So spoke my dear old friend; and has there ever been a step in human progress that has not been taken against the prayers of some good soul, and been washed by tears sincerely and despondently shed? But, for all this, is there not a true unity of the faith in all good hearts? and when they have risen a little above the mists of earth, may not both sides — the conqueror and the conquered — agree that God hath given them the victory in advancing the cause of truth and goodness?

Only one other conversation that I heard during this memorable visit fixed itself very strongly in my mind. On the evening of this same day, we three children were stationed at a table to look at a volume of engravings of beautiful birds, while Miss Debby, Lady Widgery and Madam Kittery sat by the fire. I heard them talking of Ellery Davenport, and, though I had been instructed that it was not proper for children to listen when their elders were talking among themselves, yet it really was not possible to avoid hearing what Miss Debby said, because all her words were delivered with such a sharp and determinate emphasis.

As it appeared, Lady Widgery had been relating to them some of the trials and sorrows of Ellery Davenport's domestic life. And then there followed a buzz of some kind of story which Lady Widgery seemed relating with great

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minuteness. At last I heard Miss Deborah exclaim earnestly: "If I had a daughter, catch me letting her be intimate with Ellery Davenport! I tell you that man has n't read French for nothing."

"I do assure you, his conduct has been marked with perfect decorum," said Lady Widgery.

"So are your French novels," said Miss Deborah; "they are always talking about decorum; they are full of decorum and piety! why, the kingdom of heaven is nothing to them! but somehow they all end in adultery."

"Debby," said the old lady, "I can't bear to hear you talk so. I think your cousin's heart is in the right place, after all; and he 's a good, kind boy as ever was."

"But, mother, he 's a liar! that 's just what he is."

"Debby, Debby! how can you talk so?"

"Well, mother, people have different names for different things. I hear a great deal about Ellery Davenport's tact and knowledge of the world, and all that; but he does a great deal of what I call lying, — so there! Now there are some folks who lie blunderingly, and unskillfully, but I 'll say for Ellery Davenport that he can lie as innocently and sweetly and prettily as a Frenchwoman, and I can't say any more. And if a woman does n't want to believe him, she just must n't listen to him, that 's all. I always believe him when he is around, but when he 's away and I think him over, I know just what he is, and see just what an old fool he has made of me."

These words dropped into my childish mind as if you should accidentally drop a ring into a deep well. I did not think of them much at the time, but there came a day in my life when the ring was fished up out of the well, good as new.

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CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT "OUR FOLKS" SAID AT OLDTOWN

We children returned to Oldtown, crowned with victory, as it were. Then, as now, even in the simple and severe Puritanical village, there was much incense burnt upon the altar of gentility, — a deity somewhat corresponding to the unknown god whose altar Paul found at Athens, and probably more universally worshiped in all the circles of this lower world than any other idol on record.

Now we had been taken notice of, put forward, and patronized, in undeniably genteel society. We had been to Boston and come back in a coach; and what well-regulated mind does not see that that was something to inspire respect?

Aunt Lois was evidently dying to ask us all manner of questions, but was restrained by a sort of decent pride. To exhibit any undue eagerness would be to concede that she was ignorant of good society, and that the ways and doings of upper classes were not perfectly familiar to her. That, my dear reader, is what no good democratic American woman can for a moment concede. Aunt Lois, therefore, for once in her life, looked complacently on Sam Lawson, who continued to occupy his usual roost in the chimney-corner, and who, embarrassed with no similar delicate scruples, put us through our catechism with the usual Yankee thoroughness.

"Well, children, I suppose them Kitterys has everythin' in real grander, don't they? I've heerd tell that they hes Turkey carpets on th' floors. You know Josh Kittery, he

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was in the Injy trade. Turkey carpets is that kind, you know, that lies all up thick like a mat. They had that kind, did n't they?"

We eagerly assured him that they did.

"Want to know, now," said Sam, who always moralized as he went along. "Wal, wal, some folks does seem to receive their good thin's in this life, don't they? S'pose the tea-things all on 'em was solid silver, wa'n't they? Yeh did n't ask them, did yeh?"

"Oh no," said I; "you know we were told we must n't ask questions."

"Jes so; very right, — little boys should n't ask questions. But I 've heerd a good 'eal about the Kittery silver. Jake Marshall, he knew a fellah that had talked with one of their servants, that helped bury it in the cellar in war-times, and he said theh was porringers an' spoons an' tankards, say nothing of table-spoons, an' silver forks, an' sich. That 'ere would ha' been a haul for Congress, if they could ha' got hold on 't in war-time, would n't it? S'pose yeh was sot up all so grand, and hed servants to wait on yeh, behind yer chairs, did n't yeh?"

"Yes," we assured him, "we did."

"Wal, wal; yeh must n't be carried away by these 'ere glories: they 's transitory, arter all: ye must jest come right daown to plain livin'. How many servants d' yeh say they kep'?"

"Why, there were two men and two women, besides Lady Widgery's maid and Mrs. Margery."

"And all used to come in to prayers every night," said Harry.

"Hes prayers reg'lar, does they?" said Sam. "Well, now, that 'ere beats all? Did n't know as these gran' families wus so pious as that comes to. Who prayed?"

"Old Madam Kittery," said I. "She used to read prayers out of a large book."

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"Oh yis; these 'ere gran' Tory families is 'Piscopal, pretty much all on 'em. But now readin' prayers out of a book, that 'ere don't strike me as just the right kind o' thing. For my part, I like prayers that come right out of the heart better. But then, lordy massy, folks hes theh different ways; an' I ain't so set as Polly is. Why, I b'lieve, if that 'ere woman had her way, theh would n't nobody be 'lowed to do nothin', except just to suit her. Yeh did n't notice, did yeh, what the Kittery coat of arms was?"

Yes, we had noticed it; and Harry gave a full description of an embroidered set of armorial bearings which had been one of the ornaments of the parlor.

"So you say," said Sam, "'t was a lion upon his hind legs, — that 'ere is what they call 'the lion rampant,' — and then there was a key and a scroll. Wal! coats of arms is curus, and I don't wonder folks kind o' hangs onter um; but then, the Kitterys bein' Tories, they nat'ally has more interest in sech thin's. Do you know where Mis' Kittery keeps her silver nights?"

"No, really," said I; "we were sent to bed early, and did n't see."

Now this inquiry, from anybody less innocent than Sam Lawson, might have been thought a dangerous exhibition of burglarious proclivities; but from him it was received only as an indication of that everlasting thirst for general information which was his leading characteristic.

When the rigor of his cross-examination had somewhat abated, he stooped over the fire to meditate further inquiries. I seized the opportunity to propound to my grandmother a query which had been the result of my singular experiences for a day or two past. So, after an interval in which all had sat silently looking into the great coals of the fire, I suddenly broke out with the inquiry, "Grandmother, what is *The True Church?*"

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I remember the expression on my grandfather's calm, benign face as I uttered this query. It was an expression of shrewd amusement, such as befits the face of an elder when a younger has propounded a well-worn problem; but my grandmother had her answer at the tip of her tongue, and replied, "It is the whole number of the elect, my son."

I had in my head a confused remembrance of Ellery Davenport's tirade on election, and of the elect who did or did not have clean shirts; so I pursued my inquiry by asking, "Who are the elect?"

"All good people," replied my grandfather. "In every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him."

"Well, how came you to ask that question?" said my grandmother, turning on me.

"Why," said I, "because Miss Deborah Kittery said that the war destroyed the true Church in this country."

"Oh, pshaw!" said my grandmother; "that's some of her Episcopal nonsense. I really should like to ask her, now, if she thinks there ain't any one going to heaven but Episcopalians."

"Oh no, she doesn't think so," said I, rather eagerly. "She said a great many good people would be saved out of the Church, but they would be saved by uncovenanted mercies."

"Uncovenanted fiddlesticks!" said my grandmother, her very cap-border bristling with contempt and defiance. "Now, Lois, you just see what comes of sending children into Tory Episcopal families, — coming home and talking nonsense like that!"

"Mercy, mother! what odds does it make?" said Aunt Lois. "The children have got to learn to hear all sorts of things said, — may as well hear them at one time as another. Besides, it all goes into one ear and out at the other."

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My grandmother was better pleased with the account that I hastened to give her of my visit to the graves of the saints and martyrs, in my recent pilgrimage. Her broad face glowed with delight, as she told over again to our listening ears the stories of the faith and self-denial of those who had fled from an oppressive king and church, that they might plant a new region where life should be simpler, easier, and more natural. And she got out her "Cotton Mather," and, notwithstanding Aunt Lois's reminder that she had often read it before, read to us again, in a trembling yet audible voice, that wonderful document, in which the reasons for the first planting of New England are set forth. Some of these reasons I remember from often hearing them in my childhood. They speak thus quaintly of the old countries of Europe: —

"*Thirdly.* The land grows weary of her inhabitants, insomuch that *man*, which is the most precious of all creatures, is here more vile than the earth he treads upon, — children, neighbors, and friends, especially the *poor*, which, if things were right, would be the greatest earthly blessings.

"*Fourthly.* We are grown to that intemperance in all *excess of riot*, as no mean estate will suffice a man to keep sail with his *equals*, and he that fails in it must live in scorn and contempt; hence it comes to pass that all *arts* and *trades* are carried in that deceitful manner and unrighteous course, as it is almost impossible for a good, upright man to maintain his constant charge, and live comfortably in them.

"*Fifthly.* The schools of learning and religion are so corrupted as (besides the insupportable charge of education) most children of the best, wittiest, and of the fairest hopes are perverted, corrupted, and utterly overthrown by the multitude of evil examples and licentious behaviors in these *seminaries*.

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"*Sixthly.* The *whole earth* is the Lord's *garden*, and he hath given it to the sons of Adam to be tilled and improved by them. Why, then, should we stand starving here for places of habitation, and in the mean time suffer whole countries as profitable for the use of man to lie waste without any improvement?"

Language like this, often repeated, was not lost upon us. The idea of self-sacrifice which it constantly inculcated, — the reverence for self-denial, — the conception of a life which should look, not mainly to selfish interests, but to the good of the whole human race, prevented the hardness and roughness of those early New England days from becoming mere stolid, material toil. It was toil and manual labor ennobled by a new motive.

Even in those very early times there was some dawning sense of what the great American nation was yet to be. And every man, woman, and child was constantly taught, by every fireside, to feel that he or she was part and parcel of a great new movement in human progress. The old aristocratic ideas, though still lingering in involuntary manners and customs, only served to give a sort of quaintness and grace of Old-World culture to the roughness of new-fledged democracy.

Our visit to Boston was productive of good to us such as we little dreamed of. In the course of a day or two Lady Lothrop called, and had a long private interview with the female portion of the family; after which, to my great delight, it was announced to us that Harry and I might begin to study Latin, if we pleased, and if we proved bright, good boys, means would be provided for the finishing of our education in college.

I was stunned and overwhelmed by the great intelligence, and Harry and I ran over to tell it to Tina, who jumped about and hugged and kissed us both with an impartiality which some years later she quite forgot to practice.

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"I'm glad, because you like it," she said; "but I should think it would be horrid to study Latin."

I afterwards learned that I was indebted to my dear old friend Madam Kittery for the good fortune which had befallen me. She had been interested in my story, as it appears, to some purpose, and, being wealthy and without a son, had resolved to console herself by appropriating to the education of a poor boy a portion of the wealth which should have gone to her own child.

The searching out of poor boys, and assisting them to a liberal education, had ever been held to be one of the appropriate works of the minister in a New England town. The schoolmaster who taught the district school did not teach Latin; but Lady Lothrop was graciously pleased to say that, for the present, Dr. Lothrop would hear our lessons at a certain hour every afternoon; and the reader may be assured that we studied faithfully in view of an ordeal like this.

I remember one of our favorite places for study. The brown, sparkling stream on which my grandfather's mill was placed had just below the mill-dam a little island, which a boy could easily reach by wading through the shallow waters over a bed of many-colored pebbles. The island was overshadowed by thick bushes, which were all wreathed and matted together by a wild grape-vine; but within I had hollowed out for myself a green little arbor, and constructed a rude wigwam of poles and bark, after the manner of those I had seen among the Indians. It was one of the charms of this place, that nobody knew of it: it was utterly secluded; and being cut off from land by the broad belt of shallow water, and presenting nothing to tempt or attract anybody to its shores, it was mine, and mine alone. There I studied, and there I read; there I dreamed and saw visions.

Never did I find it in my heart to tell to any other boy

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the secret of this woodland shelter, this fairy-land, so near to the real outer world; but Harry, with his refinement, his quietude, his sympathetic silence, seemed to me as unobjectionable an associate as the mute spiritual companions whose presence had cheered my lonely, childish sleeping-room.

We moved my father's Latin books into a rough little closet that we constructed in our wigwam; and there, with the water dashing behind us, and the afternoon sun shining down through the green grape-leaves, with bluebirds and bobolinks singing to us, we studied our lessons. More than that, we spent many pleasant hours in reading; and I have now a *résumé*, in our boyish handwriting, of the greater part of Plutarch's Lives, which we wrote out during this summer.

As to Tina, of course she insisted upon it that we should occasionally carry her in a lady-chair over to this island, that she might inspect our operations and our housekeeping, and we read some of these sketches to her for her critical approbation; and if any of them pleased her fancy, she would immediately insist that we should come over to Miss Mehitable's, and have a dramatic representation of them up in the garret.

Saturday afternoon, in New England, was considered, from time immemorial, as the children's perquisite; and hard-hearted must be that parent or that teacher who would wish to take away from them its golden hours. Certainly it was not Miss Mehitable, nor my grandmother, that could be capable of any such cruelty.

Our Saturday afternoons were generally spent as Tina dictated; and, as she had a decided taste for the drama, one of our most common employments was the improvising of plays, with Miss Tina for stage manager. The pleasure we took in these exercises was inconceivable; they had for us a vividness and reality past all expression.

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I remember our acting, at one time, the Book of Esther, with Tina, very much be-trinketed and dressed out in an old flowered brocade that she had rummaged from a trunk in the garret, as Queen Esther. Harry was Mordecai, and I was Ahasuerus.

The great trouble was to find a Haman; but, as the hanging of Haman was indispensable to any proper moral effect of the tragedy, Tina petted and cajoled and coaxed old Bose, the yellow dog of our establishment, to undertake the part instructing him volubly that he must sulk and look cross when Mordecai went by, — a thing which Bose, who was one of the best-natured of dogs, found difficulty in learning. Bose would always insist upon sitting on his haunches, in his free-and-easy, jolly manner, and lolling out his red tongue in a style so decidedly jocular as utterly to spoil the effect, till Tina, reduced to desperation, ensconced herself under an old quilted petticoat behind him, and brought out the proper expression at the right moment by a vigorous pull at his tail. Bose was a dog of great constitutional equanimity, but there were some things that transcended even his powers of endurance, and the snarl that he gave to Mordecai was held to be a triumphant success; but the thing was, to get him to snarl when Tina was in front of him, where she could see it; and now will it be believed that the all-conquering little mischief-maker actually kissed and flattered and bejuggled old Polly into taking this part behind the scenes?

No words can more fitly describe the abject state to which that vehemently moral old soul was reduced.

When it came to the hanging of Haman, the difficulties thickened. Polly warned us that we must by no means attempt to hang Bose by the neck, as "the crittur was heavy, and 't was sartin to be the death of him." So we compromised by passing the rope under his fore paws, or, as Tina called it, "under his arms." But Bose was rheu-

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matic, and it took all Tina's petting and caressing, and obliged Polly to go down and hunt out two or three slices of meat from her larder, to induce him fairly to submit to the operation; but hang him we did, and he ki-hied with a vigor that strikingly increased the moral effect. So we soon let him down again, and plentifully rewarded him with cold meat.

In a similar manner we performed a patriotic drama, entitled "The Battle of Bunker Hill," in which a couple of old guns that we found in the garret produced splendid effects, and salvoes of artillery were created by the rolling across the garret of two old cannon-balls; but this was suppressed by order of the authorities, on account of the vigor of the cannonade. Tina, by the by, figured in this as the "Genius of Liberty," with some stars on her head cut out of gilt paper, and wearing an old flag which we had pulled out of one of the trunks.

We also acted the history of "Romulus and Remus," with Bose for the she-wolf. The difference in age was remedied by a vigorous effort of the imagination. Of course, operations of this nature made us pretty familiar with the topography of the old garret. There was, however, one quarter, fenced off by some barrels filled with pamphlets, where Polly strictly forbade us to go.

What was the result of such a prohibition, O reader? Can you imagine it to be any other than that that part of the garret became at once the only one that we really cared about investigating? How we hung about it, and considered it, and peeped over and around and between the barrels at a pile of pictures, that stood with their faces to the wall! What were those pictures, we wondered. When we asked Polly this, she drew on a mysterious face and said, "*Them* was things we must n't ask about."

We talked it over among ourselves, and Tina assured us that she dreamed about it nights; but Polly had strictly

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forbidden us even to mention that corner of the garret to Miss Mehitable, or to ask her leave to look at it, alleging, as a reason, that "'t would bring on her hypos."

We didn't know what "hypos" were, but we supposed of course they must be something dreadful; but the very fearfulness of the consequences that might ensue from our getting behind those fatal barrels only made them still more attractive. Finally, one rainy Saturday afternoon, when we were tired of acting plays, and the rain pattered on the roof, and the wind howled and shook the casings, and there was a generally wild and disorganized state of affairs out of doors, a sympathetic spirit of insubordination appeared to awaken in Tina's bosom. "I declare, I am going inside of those barrels!" she said. "I don't care if Polly does scold us; I know I can bring her all round again fast enough. I can do about what I like with Polly. Now you boys just move this barrel a little bit, and I'll go in and see!"

Just at this moment there was one of those chance lulls in the storm that sometimes occur, and as Tina went in behind the barrels, and boldly turned the first picture, a ray of sunshine streamed through the dusky window and lit it up with a watery light.

Harry and Tina both gave an exclamation of astonishment.

"O Tina! it's the lady in the closet!"

The discovery seemed really to frighten the child. She retreated quickly to the outside of the barrels again, and stood with us, looking at the picture.

It was a pastel of a young girl in a plain, low-necked white dress, with a haughty, beautiful head, and jet-black curls flowing down her neck, and deep, melancholy black eyes, that seemed to fix themselves reproachfully on us.

"Oh dear me, Harry, what shall we do?" said Tina.

"How she looks at us! This certainly is the very same one that we saw in the old house."

"You ought not to have done it, Tina," said Harry, in

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a rather low and frightened voice; "but I 'll go in and turn it back again."

Just at this moment we heard what was still more appalling, — the footsteps of Polly on the garret stairs.

"Well! now I should like to know if there 's any mischief you would n't be up to, Tina Percival," she said, coming forward, reproachfully. "When I give you the run of the whole garret, and wear my life out a-pickin' up and puttin' up after you, I sh'd think you might let this 'ere corner alone!"

"Oh! but, Polly, you 've no idea how I wanted to see it, and do pray tell me who it is, and how came it here? Is it anybody that 's dead?" said Tina, hanging upon Polly caressingly.

"Somebody that 's dead to us, I 'm afraid," said Polly, solemnly.

"Do tell us, Polly, *do!* who was she?"

"Well, child, you must n't *never* tell nobody, nor let a word about it come out of your lips; but it 's Parson Rossiter's daughter Emily, and where she 's gone to, the Lord only knows. I took that 'ere pictur' down myself, and put it up here with Mr. Theodore's, so 't Miss Mehitable need n't see 'em, 'cause they always give her the hypos."

"And don't anybody know where she is," said Tina, "or if she 's alive or dead?"

"Nobody," said Polly, shaking her head solemnly. "All I hope is, she may never come back here again. You see, children, what comes o' follerin' the nateral heart; it 's deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. She followed her nateral heart, and nobody knows where she 's gone to."

Polly spoke with such sepulchral earnestness that, what with gloomy weather and the consciousness of having been accessory to an unlawful action, we all felt, to say the least, extremely sober.

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"Do you think I have got such a heart as that?" said Tina, after a deep-drawn sigh.

"Sartain, you have," said the old woman. "We all on us has. Why, if the Lord should give any on us a sight o' our own heart just as it is, it would strike us down dead right on the spot."

"Mercy on us, Polly! I hope he won't, then," said Tina. "But, Polly," she added, getting her arms round her neck and playing with her gold beads, "*you* have n't got such a very bad heart now; I don't believe a word of it. I 'm sure you are just as *good* as can be."

"Law, Miss Tina, you don't see into me," said Polly, who, after all, felt a sort of ameliorating gleam stealing over her. "You must n't try to wheedle me into thinking better of myself than I be; that would just lead to carnal security."

"Well, Polly, don't tell Miss Mehitable, and I 'll try and not get you into carnal security."

Polly went behind the barrels, gently wiped the dust from the picture, and turned the melancholy, beseeching face to the wall again; but we pondered and talked many days as to what it might be.

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CHAPTER XXVII

HOW WE KEPT THANKSGIVING AT OLDTOWN

On the whole, about this time in our life we were a reasonably happy set of children. The Thanksgiving festival of that year is particularly impressed on my mind as a white day.

Are there any of my readers who do not know what Thanksgiving day is to a child? Then let them go back with me, and recall the image of it as we kept it in Oldtown.

People have often supposed, because the Puritans founded a society where there were no professed public amusements, that therefore there was no fun going on in the ancient land of Israel, and that there were no cakes and ale, because they were virtuous. They were never more mistaken in their lives. There was an abundance of sober, well-considered merriment; and the hinges of life were well oiled with that sort of secret humor which to this day gives the raciness to real Yankee wit. Besides this, we must remember that life itself is the greatest possible amusement to people who really believe they can do much with it, — who have that intense sense of what can be brought to pass by human effort, that was characteristic of the New England colonies. To such it is not exactly proper to say that life is an amusement, but it certainly is an engrossing interest that takes the place of all amusements.

Looking over the world on a broad scale, do we not find that public entertainments have very generally been the sops thrown out by engrossing upper classes to keep lower

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classes from inquiring too particularly into their rights, and to make them satisfied with a stone, when it was not quite convenient to give them bread? Wherever there is a class that is to be made content to be plundered of its rights, there is an abundance of fiddling and dancing, and amusements, public and private, are in great requisition. It may also be set down, I think, as a general axiom, that people feel the need of amusements less and less, precisely in proportion as they have solid reasons for being happy.

Our good Puritan fathers intended to form a state of society of such equality of conditions, and to make the means of securing the goods of life so free to all, that everybody should find abundant employment for his faculties in a prosperous seeking of his fortunes. Hence, while they forbade theatres, operas, and dances, they made a state of unparalleled peace and prosperity, where one could go to sleep at all hours of day or night with the house door wide open, without bolt or bar, yet without apprehension of any to molest or make afraid.

There were, however, some few national fêtes, — election day, when the Governor took his seat with pomp and rejoicing, and all the housewives outdid themselves in election cake, and one or two training days, when all the children were refreshed, and our military ardor quickened, by the roll of drums, and the flash of steel bayonets, and marchings and evolutions, — sometimes ending in that sublimest of military operations, a sham fight, in which nobody was killed. The Fourth of July took high rank, after the Declaration of Independence; but the king and high priest of all festivals was the autumn Thanksgiving.

When the apples were all gathered and the cider was all made, and the yellow pumpkins were rolled in from many a hill in billows of gold, and the corn was husked, and the labors of the season were done, and the warm, late days of Indian Summer came in, dreamy and calm and still, with

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just frost enough to crisp the ground of a morning, but with warm trances of benignant, sunny hours at noon, there came over the community a sort of genial repose of spirit, a sense of something accomplished, and of a new golden mark made in advance on the calendar of life, — and the deacon began to say to the minister, of a Sunday, "I suppose it 's about time for the Thanksgiving proclamation."

Rural dress-makers about this time were extremely busy in making up festival garments, for everybody's new dress, if she was to have one at all, must appear on Thanksgiving day.

Aunt Keziah and Aunt Lois and my mother talked over their bonnets, and turned them round and round on their hands, and discoursed sagely of ribbons and linings, and of all the kindred bonnets that there were in the parish, and how they would probably appear after Thanksgiving. My grandmother, whose mind had long ceased to wander on such worldly vanities, was at this time officiously reminded by her daughters that her bonnet was n't respectable, or it was announced to her that she *must* have a new gown. Such were the distant horizon gleams of the Thanksgiving festival.

We also felt its approach in all departments of the household, — the conversation at this time beginning to turn on high and solemn culinary mysteries and receipts of wondrous power and virtue. New modes of elaborating squash pies and quince tarts were now ofttimes carefully discussed at the evening fireside by Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah, and notes seriously compared with the experiences of certain other Aunties of high repute in such matters. I noticed that on these occasions their voices often fell into mysterious whispers, and that receipts of especial power and sanctity were communicated in tones so low as entirely to escape the vulgar ear. I still remember the solemn shake of the head with which my Aunt Lois conveyed to

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Miss Mehitable Rossiter the critical properties of mace, in relation to its powers of producing in corn fritters a suggestive resemblance to oysters. As ours was an oyster-getting district, and as that charming bivalve was perfectly easy to come at, the interest of such an imitation can be accounted for only by the fondness of the human mind for works of art.

For as much as a week beforehand, "we children" were employed in chopping mince for pies to a most wearisome fineness, and in pounding cinnamon, allspice, and cloves in a great lignumvitæ mortar; and the sound of this pounding and chopping reëchoed through all the rafters of the old house with a hearty and vigorous cheer, most refreshing to our spirits.

In those days there were none of the thousand ameliorations of the labors of housekeeping which have since arisen, — no ground and prepared spices and sweet herbs; everything came into our hands in the rough, and in bulk, and the reducing of it into a state for use was deemed one of the appropriate labors of childhood. Even the very salt that we used in cooking was rock-salt, which we were required to wash and dry and pound and sift, before it became fit for use.

At other times of the year we sometimes murmured at these labors, but those that were supposed to usher in the great Thanksgiving festival were always entered into with enthusiasm. There were signs of richness all around us, — stoning of raisins, cutting of citron, slicing of candied orange-peel. Yet all these were only dawnings and intimations of what was coming during the week of real preparation, after the Governor's proclamation had been read.

The glories of that proclamation! We knew beforehand the Sunday it was to be read, and walked to church with alacrity, filled with gorgeous and vague expectations.

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The cheering anticipation sustained us through what seemed to us the long waste of the sermon and prayers; and when at last the auspicious moment approached, — when the last quaver of the last hymn had died out, — the whole house rippled with a general movement of complacency, and a satisfied smile of pleased expectation might be seen gleaming on the faces of all the young people, like a ray of sunshine through a garden of flowers.

Thanksgiving now was dawning! We children poked one another, and fairly giggled with unreproved delight as we listened to the crackle of the slowly unfolding document. That great sheet of paper impressed us as something supernatural, by reason of its mighty size, and by the broad seal of the State affixed thereto; and when the minister read therefrom, "By his Excellency, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a Proclamation," our mirth was with difficulty repressed by admonitory glances from our sympathetic elders. Then, after a solemn enumeration of the benefits which the Commonwealth had that year received at the hands of Divine Providence, came at last the naming of the eventful day, and, at the end of all, the imposing heraldic words, "God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." And then, as the congregation broke up and dispersed, all went their several ways with schemes of mirth and feasting in their heads.

And now came on the week in earnest. In the very watches of the night preceding Monday morning, a preternatural stir below stairs, and the thunder of the pounding-barrel, announced that the washing was to be got out of the way before daylight, so as to give "ample scope and room enough" for the more pleasing duties of the season.

The making of pies at this period assumed vast proportions that verged upon the sublime. Pies were made by forties and fifties and hundreds, and made of everything on the earth and under the earth.

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The pie is an English institution, which, planted on American soil, forthwith ran rampant and burst forth into an untold variety of genera and species. Not merely the old traditional mince pie, but a thousand strictly American seedlings from that main stock, evinced the power of American housewives to adapt old institutions to new uses. Pumpkin pies, cranberry pies, huckleberry pies, cherry pies, green-currant pies, peach, pear, and plum pies, custard pies, apple pies, Marlborough-pudding pies, — pies with top crusts, and pies without, — pies adorned with all sorts of fanciful flutings and architectural strips laid across and around, and otherwise varied, attested the boundless fertility of the feminine mind, when once let loose in a given direction.

Fancy the heat and vigor of the great pan-formation, when Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah, and my mother and grandmother all in ecstasies of creative inspiration, ran, bustled, and hurried, — mixing, rolling, tasting, consulting, — alternately setting us children to work when anything could be made of us, and then chasing us all out of the kitchen when our misinformed childhood ventured to take too many liberties with sacred mysteries. Then out we would all fly at the kitchen door, like sparks from a blacksmith's window.

On these occasions, as there was a great closeness in the police department over us children, we usually found a ready refuge at Miss Mehitable's with Tina, who, confident of the strength of her position with Polly, invited us into the kitchen, and with the air of a mistress led us around to view the proceedings there.

A genius for entertaining was one of Tina's principal characteristics; and she did not fail to make free with raisins, or citron, or whatever came to hand, in a spirit of hospitality at which Polly seriously demurred. That worthy woman occasionally felt the inconvenience of the state

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of subjugation to which the little elf had somehow or other reduced her, and sometimes rattled her chains fiercely, scolding with a vigor which rather alarmed us, but which Tina minded not a whit. Confident of her own powers, she would, in the very midst of her wrath, mimic her to her face with such irresistible drollery as to cause the torrent of reproof to end in a dissonant laugh, accompanied by a submissive cry for quarter.

"I declare, Tina Percival," she said to her one day, "you 're saucy enough to physic a horn-bug! I never did see the beater of you! If Miss Mehitable don't keep you in better order, I don't see what 's to become of any of us!"

"Why, what did become of you before I came?" was the undismayed reply. "You know, Polly, you and Aunty both were just as lonesome as you could be till I came here, and you never had such pleasant times in your life as you 've had since I 've been here. You 're a couple of old beauties, both of you, and know just how to get along with me. But come, boys, let 's take our raisins and go up in the garret and play Thanksgiving."

In the corner of the great kitchen, during all these days, the jolly old oven roared and crackled in great volcanic billows of flame, snapping and gurgling as if the old fellow entered with joyful sympathy into the frolic of the hour; and then, his great heart being once warmed up, he brooded over successive generations of pies and cakes, which went in raw and came out cooked, till butteries and dressers and shelves and pantries were literally crowded with a jostling abundance.

A great cold northern chamber, where the sun never shone, and where in winter the snow sifted in at the window-cracks, and ice and frost reigned with undisputed sway, was fitted up to be the storehouse of these surplus treasures. There, frozen solid, and thus well preserved in their icy fetters, they formed a great repository for all the

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winter months; and the pies baked at Thanksgiving often came out fresh and good with the violets of April.

During this eventful preparation week, all the female part of my grandmother's household, as I have before remarked, were at a height above any ordinary state of mind, — they moved about the house rapt in a species of prophetic frenzy. It seemed to be considered a necessary feature of such festivals, that everybody should be in a hurry, and everything in the house should be turned bottom upwards with enthusiasm, — so at least we children understood it, and we certainly did our part to keep the ball rolling.

At this period the constitutional activity of Uncle Fliakim increased to a degree that might fairly be called preternatural. Thanksgiving time was the time for errands of mercy and beneficence through the country; and Uncle Fliakim's immortal old rubber horse and rattling wagon were on the full jump, in tours of investigation into everybody's affairs in the region around. On returning, he would fly through our kitchen like the wind, leaving open the doors, upsetting whatever came in his way, — now a pan of milk, and now a basin of mince, — talking rapidly, and forgetting only the point in every case that gave it significance, or enabled any one to put it to any sort of use. When Aunt Lois checked his benevolent effusions by putting the test questions of practical efficiency, Uncle Fliakim always remembered that he 'd "forgotten to inquire about that," and skipping through the kitchen, and springing into his old wagon, would rattle off again on a full tilt to correct and amend his investigations.

Moreover, my grandmother's kitchen at this time began to be haunted by those occasional hangers-on and retainers, of uncertain fortunes, whom a full experience of her bountiful habits led to expect something at her hand at this time of the year. All the poor, loafing tribes, Indian and half-

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Indian, who at other times wandered, selling baskets and other light wares, were sure to come back to Oldtown a little before Thanksgiving time, and report themselves in my grandmother's kitchen.

The great hogshead of cider in the cellar, which my grandfather called the Indian Hogshead, was on tap at all hours of the day; and many a mugful did I draw and dispense to the tribes that basked in the sunshine at our door.

Aunt Lois never had a hearty conviction of the propriety of these arrangements; but my grandmother, who had a prodigious verbal memory, bore down upon her with such strings of quotations from the Old Testament that she was utterly routed.

"Now," says my Aunt Lois, "I s'pose we 've got to have Betty Poganut and Sally Wonsamug, and old Obscue and his wife, and the whole tribe down, roosting around our doors, till we give 'em something. That 's just mother's way; she always keeps a whole generation at her heels."

"How many times must I tell you, Lois, to read your Bible?" was my grandmother's rejoinder; and loud over the sound of pounding and chopping in the kitchen could be heard the voice of her quotations: "If there be among you a poor man in any of the gates of the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand, from thy poor brother. Thou shalt surely give him; and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest to him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works; for the poor shall never cease from out of the land."

Those words seemed to resound like a sort of heraldic proclamation to call around us all that softly shiftless class, who, for some reason or other, are never to be found with anything in hand at the moment that it is wanted.

"There, to be sure," said Aunt Lois, one day when our

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preparations were in full blast, — "there comes Sam Lawson down the hill, limpsy as ever; now he 'll have his doleful story to tell, and mother 'll give him one of the turkeys." And so, of course, it fell out.

Sam came in with his usual air of plaintive assurance, and seated himself, a contemplative spectator, in the chimney-corner, regardless of the looks and signs of unwelcome on the part of Aunt Lois.

"Lordy massy, how prosperous everything does seem here!" he said, in musing tones, over his inevitable mug of cider; — "so different from what 't is t' our house. There 's Hepsy, she 's all in a stew, an' I 've just been an' got her thirty-seven cents' wuth o' nutmegs, yet she says she 's sure she don't see how she 's to keep Thanksgiving, an' she 's down on me about it, just as ef 't was my fault. Yeh see, last winter our old gobbler got froze. You know, Mis' Badger, that 'ere cold night we hed last winter. Wal, I was off with Jake Marshall that night; ye see, Jake, he hed to take old General Dearborn's corpse into Boston, to the family vault, and Jake, he kind o' hated to go alone; 't was a drefful cold time, and he ses to me, 'Sam, you jes' go 'long with me;' so I was sort o' sorry for him, and I kind o' thought I 'd go 'long. Wal, come 'long to Josh Bissel's tavern, there at the Half-way House, you know, 't was so swinging cold we stopped to take a little suthin' warmin', an' we sort o' sot an' sot over the fire, till, fust we knew, we kind o' got asleep; an' when we woke up we found we 'd left the old General hitched up t' th' post pretty much all night. Wal, did n't hurt him none, poor man; 't was allers a favorite spot o' his 'n. But, takin' one thing with another, I did n't get home till about noon next day, an' I tell you, Hepsy she was right down on me. She said the baby was sick, and there had n't been no wood split, nor the barn fastened up, nor nothin'. Lordy massy, I did n't mean no harm; I thought

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there was wood enough, and I thought likely Hepsy 'd git out an' fasten up the barn. But Hepsy, she was in one o' her contrary streaks, an' she would n't do a thing; an', when I went out to look, why, sure 'nuff, there was our old tom-turkey froze as stiff as a stake, — his claws jist a-stickin' right straight up like this." Here Sam struck an expressive attitude, and looked so much like a frozen turkey as to give a pathetic reality to the picture.

"Well now, Sam, why need you be off on things that 's none of your business?" said my grandmother. "I 've talked to you plainly about that a great many times, Sam," she continued, in tones of severe admonition. "Hepsy is a hard-working woman, but she can't be expected to see to everything, and you oughter 'ave been at home that night to fasten up your own barn and look after your own creeturs."

Sam took the rebuke all the more meekly as he perceived the stiff black legs of a turkey poking out from under my grandmother's apron while she was delivering it. To be exhorted and told of his shortcomings, and then furnished with a turkey at Thanksgiving, was a yearly part of his family programme. In time he departed, not only with the turkey, but with us boys in procession after him, bearing a mince and a pumpkin pie for Hepsy's children.

"Poor things!" my grandmother remarked. "They ought to have something good to eat Thanksgiving day; 't ain't their fault that they 've got a shiftless father."

Sam, in his turn, moralized to us children, as we walked beside him: "A body 'd think that Hepsy 'd learn to trust in Providence," he said, "but she don't. She allers has a Thanksgiving dinner pervided; but that 'ere woman ain't grateful for it, by no manner o' means. Now she 'll be jest as cross as she can be, 'cause this 'ere ain't our turkey, and these 'ere ain't our pies. Folks doos lose so much, that hes sech dispositions."

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A multitude of similar dispensations during the course of the week materially reduced the great pile of chickens and turkeys which black Cæsar's efforts in slaughtering, picking, and dressing kept daily supplied.

Besides these offerings to the poor, the handsomest turkey of the flock was sent, dressed in first-rate style, with Deacon Badger's dutiful compliments, to the minister; and we children, who were happy to accompany black Cæsar on this errand, generally received a seed-cake and a word of acknowledgment from the minister's lady.

Well, at last, when all the chopping and pounding and baking and brewing, preparatory to the festival, were gone through with, the eventful day dawned. All the tribes of the Badger family were to come back home to the old house, with all the relations of every degree, to eat the Thanksgiving dinner. And it was understood that in the evening the minister and his lady would look in upon us, together with some of the select aristocracy of Oldtown.

Great as the preparations were for the dinner, everything was so contrived that not a soul in the house should be kept from the morning service of Thanksgiving in the church, and from listening to the Thanksgiving sermon, in which the minister was expected to express his views freely concerning the politics of the country, and the state of things in society generally, in a somewhat more secular vein of thought than was deemed exactly appropriate to the Lord's day. But it is to be confessed, that, when the good man got carried away by the enthusiasm of his subject to extend these exercises beyond a certain length, anxious glances, exchanged between good wives, sometimes indicated a weakness of the flesh, having a tender reference to the turkeys and chickens and chicken pies, which might possibly be over-doing in the ovens at home. But your old brick oven was a true Puritan institution, and backed up the devotional habits of good housewives, by the capital

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care which he took of whatever was committed to his capacious bosom. A truly well-bred oven would have been ashamed of himself all his days, and blushed redder than his own fires, if a God-fearing house-matron, away at the temple of the Lord, should come home and find her pie-crust either burned or underdone by his over or under zeal; so the old fellow generally managed to bring things out exactly right.

When sermons and prayers were all over, we children rushed home to see the great feast of the year spread.

What chitterings and chatterings there were all over the house, as all the aunties and uncles and cousins came pouring in, taking off their things, looking at one another's bonnets and dresses, and mingling their comments on the morning sermon with various opinions on the new millinery outfits, and with bits of home news, and kindly neighborhood gossip.

Uncle Bill, whom the Cambridge college authorities released, as they did all the other youngsters of the land, for Thanksgiving day, made a breezy stir among them all, especially with the young cousins of the feminine gender.

The best room on this occasion was thrown wide open, and its habitual coldness had been warmed by the burning down of a great stack of hickory logs, which had been heaped up unsparingly since morning. It takes some hours to get a room warm where a family never sits, and which therefore has not in its walls one particle of the genial vitality which comes from the indwelling of human beings. But on Thanksgiving day, at least, every year, this marvel was effected in our best room.

Although all servile labor and vain recreation on this day were by law forbidden, according to the terms of the proclamation, it was not held to be a violation of the precept, that all the nice old aunties should bring their knitting-work and sit gently trotting their needles around

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the fire; nor that Uncle Bill should start a full-fledged romp among the girls and children, while the dinner was being set on the long table in the neighboring kitchen. Certain of the good elderly female relatives, of serious and discreet demeanor, assisted at this operation.

But who shall do justice to the dinner, and describe the turkey, and chickens, and chicken pies, with all that endless variety of vegetables which the American soil and climate have contributed to the table, and which, without regard to the French doctrine of courses, were all piled together in jovial abundance upon the smoking board? There was much carving and laughing and talking and eating, and all showed that cheerful ability to dispatch the provisions which was the ruling spirit of the hour. After the meat came the plum-puddings, and then the endless array of pies, till human nature was actually bewildered and overpowered by the tempting variety; and even we children turned from the profusion offered to us, and wondered what was the matter that we could eat no more.

When all was over, my grandfather rose at the head of the table, and a fine venerable picture he made as he stood there, his silver hair flowing in curls down each side of his clear, calm face, while, in conformity to the old Puritan custom, he called their attention to a recital of the mercies of God in his dealings with their family.

It was a sort of family history, going over and touching upon the various events which had happened. He spoke of my father's death, and gave a tribute to his memory; and closed all with the application of a time-honored text, expressing the hope that as years passed by we might "so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom;" and then he gave out that psalm which in those days might be called the national hymn of the Puritans.

"Let children hear the mighty deeds
Which God performed of old,

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Which in our younger years we saw,
And which our fathers told.

"He bids us make his glories known,
His works of power and grace.
And we'll convey his wonders down
Through every rising race.

"Our lips shall tell them to our sons,
And they again to theirs;
That generations yet unborn
May teach them to their heirs.

"Thus shall they learn in God alone
Their hope securely stands;
That they may ne'er forget his works,
But practice his commands."

This we all united in singing to the venerable tune of St. Martin's, an air which, the reader will perceive, by its multiplicity of quavers and inflections gave the greatest possible scope to the cracked and trembling voices of the ancients, who united in it with even more zeal than the younger part of the community.

Uncle Fliakim Sheril, furbished up in a new crisp black suit, and with his spindle-shanks trimly incased in the smoothest of black silk stockings, looking for all the world just like an alert and spirited black cricket, outdid himself on this occasion in singing counter, in that high, weird voice that he must have learned from the wintry winds that usually piped around the corners of the old house. But any one who looked at him, as he sat with his eyes closed, beating time with head and hand, and, in short, with every limb of his body, must have perceived the exquisite satisfaction which he derived from this mode of expressing himself. I much regret to be obliged to state that my graceless Uncle Bill, taking advantage of the fact that the eyes of all his elders were devotionally closed, stationing himself a little in the rear of my Uncle Fliakim, performed an exact imitation of his counter, with such a

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killing facility that all the younger part of the audience were nearly dead with suppressed laughter. Aunt Lois, who never shut her eyes a moment on any occasion, discerned this from a distant part of the room, and in vain endeavored to stop it by vigorously shaking her head at the offender. She might as well have shaken it at a bobolink tilting on a clover-top. In fact, Uncle Bill was Aunt Lois's weak point, and the corners of her own mouth were observed to twitch in such a suspicious manner that the whole moral force of her admonition was destroyed.

And now, the dinner being cleared away, we youngsters, already excited to a tumult of laughter, tumbled into the best room, under the supervision of Uncle Bill, to relieve ourselves with a game of "blind-man's-buff," while the elderly women washed up the dishes and got the house in order, and the men-folks went out to the barn to look at the cattle, and walked over the farm and talked of the crops.

In the evening the house was all open and lighted with the best of tallow candles, which Aunt Lois herself had made with especial care for this illumination. It was understood that we were to have a dance, and black Cæsar, full of turkey and pumpkin pie, and giggling in the very jollity of his heart, had that afternoon rosined his bow, and tuned his fiddle, and practiced jigs and Virginia reels, in a way that made us children think him a perfect Orpheus.

As soon as the candles were lighted came in Miss Mehitable with her brother Jonathan, and Tina, like a gay little tassel, hanging on her withered arm. Mr. Jonathan Rossiter was a tall, well-made man, with a clear-cut, aquiline profile, and high round forehead, from which his powdered hair was brushed smoothly back and hung down behind in a long cue. His eyes were of a piercing dark gray, with that peculiar expression of depth and intensity which marks a melancholy temperament. He had a large mouth, which he kept shut with an air of firmness that suggested

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something even hard and dictatorial in his nature. He was quick and alert in all his movements, and his eyes had a searching quickness of observation, which seemed to lose nothing of what took place around him. There was an air of breeding and self-command about him; and in all his involuntary ways he bore the appearance of a man more interested to make up a judgment of others than concerned as to what their judgment might be about himself. Miss Mehitable hung upon his arm with an evident admiration and pride, which showed that when he came he made summer at least for her.

After them soon arrived the minister and his lady, — she in a grand brocade satin dress, open in front to display a petticoat brocaded with silver flowers. With her well-formed hands shining out of a shimmer of costly lace, and her feet propped on high-heeled shoes, Lady Lothrop justified the prestige of good society which always hung about her. Her lord and master, in the spotless whiteness of his ruffles on wrist and bosom, and in the immaculate keeping and neatness of all his clerical black, and the perfect *pose* of his grand full-bottomed clerical wig, did honor to her conjugal cares. They moved through the room like a royal prince and princess, with an appropriate, gracious, well-considered word for each and every one. They even returned, with punctilious civility, the awestruck obeisance of black Cæsar, who giggled over straightway with joy and exultation at the honor.

But conceive of my Aunt Lois's pride of heart, when, following in the train of these august persons, actually came Ellery Davenport, bringing upon his arm Miss Deborah Kittery. Here was a situation! Had the whole island of Great Britain waded across the Atlantic Ocean to call on Bunker Hill, the circumstance could scarcely have seemed to her more critical.

"Mercy on us!" she thought to herself, "all these Epis-

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copalians coming! I do hope mother 'll be careful; I hope she won't feel it necessary to give them a piece of her mind, as she 's always doing."

Miss Deborah Kittery, however, knew her soundings, and was too genuine an Englishwoman not to know that "every man's house is his castle," and that one must respect one's neighbor's opinions on his own ground.

As to my grandmother, her broad and buxom heart on this evening was so full of motherliness, that she could have patted the very King of England on the head, if he had been there, and comforted his soul with the assurance that she supposed he meant well, though he did n't exactly know how to manage; so, although she had a full consciousness that Miss Deborah Kittery had turned all America over to uncovenanted mercies, she nevertheless shook her warmly by the hand, and told her she hoped she 'd make herself at home. And I think she would have done exactly the same by the Pope of Rome himself, if that poor heathen sinner had presented himself on Thanksgiving evening. So vast and billowy was the ocean of her loving-kindness, and so firmly were her feet planted on the rock of the Cambridge Platform, that on it she could stand breathing prayers for all Jews, Turks, Infidels, Tories, Episcopalians, and even Roman Catholics. The very man that burnt Mr. John Rogers might have had a mug of cider in the kitchen on this evening, with an exhortation to go and sin no more.

You may imagine the astounding wassail among the young people, when two such spirits as Ellery Davenport and my Uncle Bill were pushing each other on, in one house. My Uncle Bill related the story of "the Wrymouth Family," with such twists and contortions and killing extremes of the ludicrous as perfectly overcame even the minister; and he was to be seen, at one period of the evening, with a face purple with laughter, and the tears

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actually rolling down over his well-formed cheeks, while some of the more excitable young people almost fell in trances, and rolled on the floor in the extreme of their merriment. In fact, the assemblage was becoming so tumultuous, that the scrape of Cæsar's violin, and the forming of sets for a dance, seemed necessary to restore the peace.

Whenever or wherever it was that the idea of the sinfulness of dancing arose in New England, I know not; it is a certain fact that at Oldtown, at this time, the presence of the minister and his lady was held not to be in the slightest degree incompatible with this amusement. I appeal to many of my readers, if they or their parents could not recall a time in New England when in all the large towns dancing assemblies used to be statedly held, at which the minister and his lady, though never uniting in the dance, always gave an approving attendance, and where all the decorous, respectable old church-members brought their children, and stayed to watch an amusement in which they no longer actively partook. No one looked on with a more placid and patronizing smile than Dr. Lothrop and his lady, as one after another began joining the exercise, which, commencing first with the children and young people, crept gradually upwards among the elders.

Uncle Bill would insist on leading out Aunt Lois, and the bright color rising to her thin cheeks brought back a fluttering image of what might have been beauty in some fresh, early day. Ellery Davenport insisted upon leading forth Miss Deborah Kittery, notwithstanding her oft-repeated refusals and earnest protestations to the contrary. As to Uncle Fliakim, he jumped and frisked and gyrated among the single sisters and maiden aunts, whirling them into the dance as if he had been the little black gentleman himself. With that true spirit of Christian charity which marked all his actions, he invariably chose out the homeliest

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and most neglected, and thus worthy Aunt Keziah, dear old soul, was for a time made quite prominent by his attentions.

Of course the dances in those days were of a strictly moral nature. The very thought of one of the round dances of modern times would have sent Lady Lothrop behind her big fan in helpless confusion, and exploded my grandmother like a full-charged arsenal of indignation. As it was, she stood, her broad, pleased face radiant with satisfaction, as the wave of joyousness crept up higher and higher round her, till the elders, who stood keeping time with their heads and feet, began to tell one another how they had danced with their sweethearts in good old days gone by, and the elder women began to blush and bridle, and boast of steps that they could take in their youth, till the music finally subdued them, and into the dance they went.

"Well, well!" quoth my grandmother; "they 're all at it so hearty, I don't see why I should n't try it myself." And into the Virginia reel she went, amid screams of laughter from all the younger members of the company.

But I assure you my grandmother was not a woman to be laughed at; for whatever she once set on foot, she "put through," with a sturdy energy befitting a daughter of the Puritans.

"Why should n't I dance?" she said, when she arrived red and resplendent at the bottom of the set. "Did n't Mr. Despondency and Miss Muchafraid and Mr. Readytohalt all dance together in the Pilgrim's Progress?" — and the minister in his ample flowing wig, and my lady in her stiff brocade, gave to my grandmother a solemn twinkle of approbation.

As nine o'clock struck, the whole scene dissolved and melted; for what well-regulated village would think of carrying festivities beyond that hour?

And so ended our Thanksgiving at Oldtown.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RAID ON OLDTOWN, AND UNCLE FLIAKIM'S BRAVERY

THE next morning after Thanksgiving, life resumed its usual hard, laborious course, with a sharp and imperative reaction, such as ensues when a strong spring, which has been for some time held back, is suddenly let fly again.

Certainly Aunt Lois appeared to be astir fully an hour earlier than usual, and dispelled all our golden visions of chicken pies and dancings and merry-makings, by the flat, hard summons of every-day life. We had no time to become demoralized and softened.

Breakfast this next morning was half an hour in advance of the usual time, because Aunt Lois was under some vague impression of infinite disturbances in the house, owing to the latitude of the last two weeks, and of great furbishings and repairs to be done in the best room, before it could be again shut up and condemned to silence.

While we were eating our breakfast, Sam Lawson came in, with an air of great trepidation.

"Lordy massy, Mis' Badger! what *do* you s'pose has happened?" he exclaimed, holding up his hands. "Wal! if I ever — no, I never did!" — and, before an explanation could be drawn out of him, in fluttered Uncle Fliakim, and began dancing an indignant rigadoon round the kitchen.

"Perfectly abominable! the selectmen ought to take it up!" he exclaimed, — "ought to make a State affair of it, and send to the Governor."

"Do for mercy's sake, Fliakim, sit down, and tell us what the matter is," said my grandmother.

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"I can't! I can't!! I can't!!! I've just got to hitch right up and go on after 'em; and mebbe I'll catch 'em before they get over the State line. I just wanted to borrow your breech-band, 'cause ours is broke. Where is it? Is it out in the barn, or where?"

By this time we had all arisen from table, and stood looking at one another, while Uncle Fliakim had shot out of the back door toward the barn. Of course our information must now be got out of Sam Lawson.

"Wal, you see, Deacon, who ever would ha' thought of it? They 've took every child on 'em, every one!"

"Who 's taken? what children?" said my grandmother. "Do pray begin at the right end of your story, and not come in here scaring a body to death."

"Wal, it 's Aunt Nancy Prime's children. Last night the kidnappers come to her house an' took her an' every single one of the child'en, an' goin' to carry 'em off to York State for slaves. Jake Marshall, he was round to our house this mornin', an' told me 'bout it. Jake, he 'd ben over to keep Thanksgivin', over t' Aunt Sally Proddy's; an' way over by the ten-mile tavern he met the waggin, an' Aunt Nancy, she called out to him, an' he heerd one of the fellers swear at her. The' was two fellers in the waggin, an' they was a-drivin' like mad, an' I jest come runnin' down to Mr. Sheril's, 'cause I know his horse never gits out of a canter, an' 's pretty much used to bein' twitched up sudden. But, Lordy massy, s'posin' he could ketch up with 'em, what could he do? He could n't much more 'n fly at 'em like an old hen; so I don't see what 's to be done."

"Well," said my grandfather, rising up, "if that 's the case, it 's time we should all be on the move; and I 'll go right over to Israel Scran's, and he and his two sons and I 'll go over, and I guess there 'll be enough of us to teach them reason. These kidnappers always make for the New

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York State line. Boys, you go out and tackle the old mare, and have our wagon round to the house; and, if Fliakim's wagon will hold together, the two will just carry the party."

"Lordy massy! I should like to go 'long too," said Sam Lawson. "I hain't got no special business to-day but what could be put off as well as not."

"You never do have," said Aunt Lois. "That 's the trouble with you."

"Wal, I was a-thinkin'," said Sam, "that Jake and me hes been over them roads so often, and we kind o' know all the ups an' downs an' cross-roads. Then we 's pretty intimate with some o' them Injun fellers, an' ye git them sot out on a trail arter a body, they 's like a huntin' dog."

"Well, father," said Aunt Lois, "I think it 's quite likely that Sam may be right here. He certainly knows more about such things than any decent, industrious man ought to, and it 's a pity you should n't put him to some use when you can."

"Jes' so!" said Sam. "Now, there 's reason in that 'ere; an' I 'll jes' go over to Israel's store with the Deacon. Yeh see ye can't take both the boys, 'cause one on 'em 'll have to stay and tend the store; but I tell you what 't is, I ain't no bad of a hand a-hittin' a lick at kidnappers. I could pound on 'em as willingly as ever I pounded a horseshoe; an' a woman's a woman, an' child'en 's child'en, ef they be black; that 's jes my 'pinion."

"Sam, you 're a good fellow," said my grandmother, approvingly. "But come, go right along."

Here, now, was something to prevent the wave of yesterday's excitement from flatting down into entire insipidity. Harry and I ran over instantly to tell Tina; and Tina with all her eloquence set it forth to Miss Mehitable and Polly, and we gave vent to our emotions by an immediate rush to the garret and a dramatic representation of

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the whole scene of the rescue, conducted with four or five of Tina's rag-dolls and a little old box wagon, with which we cantered and re-cantered across the garret floor in a way that would have been intolerable to any less patient and indulgent person than Miss Mehitable.

The fact is, however, that she shared in the universal excitement to such a degree, that she put on her bonnet immediately, and rushed over to the minister's to give vent to her feelings, while Polly, coming up garret, shouldered one of the guns lovingly, and declared she 'd "like nothing better than to fire it off at one o' them fellers;" and then she told us how, in her young days, where she was brought up in Maine, the painters (panthers) used to come round their log cabin at night, and howl and growl; and how they always had to keep the guns loaded; and how once her mother, during her father's absence, had treed a painter, and kept him up in his perch for hours by threatening him whenever he offered to come down, until her husband came home and shot him. Pretty stanch, reliant blood, about those times, flowed in the bosoms of the women of New England, and Polly relieved the excitement of her mind this morning by relating to us story after story of the wild forest life of her early days.

While Polly was thus giving vent to her emotions at home, Miss Mehitable had produced a corresponding excitement in the minister's family. Ellery Davenport declared his prompt intention of going up and joining the pursuing party, as he was young and strong, with all his wits about him; and, with the prestige of rank in the late Revolutionary war, such an accession to the party was of the greatest possible importance. As to Miss Deborah Kittery, she gave it as her opinion that such uprisings against law and order were just what was to be expected in a democracy. "The lower classes, my dear, you know, need to be kept down with a strong hand," she said with an in-

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structive nod of the head; "and I think we shall find that there 's no security in the way things are going on now."

Miss Mehitable and the minister listened with grave amusement while the worthy lady thus delivered herself; and, as they did not reply, she had the comfort of feeling that she had given them something to think of.

All the village, that day, was in a ferment of expectation; for Aunt Nancy was a general favorite in all the families round, and was sent for in case of elections or weddings or other high merry-makings, so that meddling with her was in fact taking away part of the vested property of Oldtown. The loafers who tilted, with their heels uppermost, on the railings of the tavern veranda, talked stringently of State rights, and some were of opinion that President Washington ought to be apprised of the fact without loss of time. My grandmother went about house in a state of indignation all day, declaring it was a pretty state of things, to be sure, and that next they should know, they should wake up some morning and find that Cæsar had been gobbled up in the night and run off with. But Harry and I calmed the fears which this seemed to excite in his breast, by a vivid description of the two guns over in Miss Mehitable's garret, and of the use that we should certainly make of them in case of an attack on Cæsar.

The chase, however, was conducted with such fire and ardor that before moonrise on the same night the captives were brought back in triumph to Oldtown village, and lodged for safe-keeping in my grandmother's house, who spared nothing in their entertainment.

A happy man was Sam Lawson that evening, as he sat in the chimney-corner and sipped his mug of cider, and recounted his adventures. "Lordy massy! well, 't was providential we took Colonel Devenport 'long with us, I tell you; he talked to them fellers in a way that made 'em

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shake in their shoes. Why, Lordy massy, when we fust came in sight on 'em, Mr. Sheril an' me, we wus in the foremost waggin, an' we saw 'em before us just as we got to the top of a long, windin' hill, an' I tell you if they did n't whip up an' go lickity-split down that 'ere hill, — I tell you, they rattled them child'en as ef they 'd ben so many punkins, an' I tell you one of 'em darned old younguns flew right over the side of the waggin, an' jest picked itself up as lively as a cricket, an' never cried. We did n't stop to take it up, but jes' kep' right along arter; an' Mr. Sheril, he hollers out, 'Whoa! whoa! stop! stop thief!' as loud as he could yell; but they jes' laughed at him; but Colonel Devenport, he come ridin' by on horseback, like thunder, an' driv' right by 'em, an' then turned round an' charged down on their horses so it driv' 'em right out the road, an' the waggin was upsot, an' the fellers, they were pitched out, an' in a minute Colonel Devenport had one on 'em by the collar an' his pistol right out to the head o' t'other. 'Now,' ses he, 'if you stir you 're a dead man!'

"Wal, Mr. Sheril, he made arter the other one, — he always means mighty well, Mr. Sheril does, — he gin a long jump, he did, an' he lit right in the middle of a tuft of blackberry-bushes an' tore his breeches as ef the heavens an' 'arth was a-goin' asunder. Yeh see, they never 'd a got 'em ef 't had n't ben for Colonel Devenport. He kep' the other feller under range of his pistol, an' told him he 'd shoot him ef he stirred; an' the feller, he was scart to death, an' he roared an' begged for mercy in a way 't would ha' done your heart good to hear.

"Wal, wal! the upshot on 't all was, when Israel Scran come down with his boy (they was in the back waggin), they got out the ropes an' tied 'em up snug, an' have ben a-fetchin' on 'em along to jail, where I guess they 'll have one spell o' considerin' their ways. But, Lordy massy,

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yeh never see such a sight as your uncle's breeches was. Mis' Sheril, she says she never see the beater of him for allus goin' off in his best clothes, 'cause, you see, he heard the news early, an' he jes' whips on his Thanksgivin' clothes an' went off in 'em just as he was. His intentions is allus so good. It 's a pity, though, he don't take more time to consider. Now I think folks ought to take things more moderate. Yeh see, these folks that hurries allus, they gits into scrapes, is just what I 'm allus a-tellin' Hepsy."

"Who were the fellows, do you know?" said my grandmother.

"Wal, one on 'em was one of them Hessians that come over in the war times, — he is a stupid crittur; but the other is Widdah Huldy Miller's son, down to Black Brook there."

"Do tell," said my grandmother, with the liveliest concern; "has Eph Miller come to that?"

"Yes, yes!" said Sam, "it 's Eph, sure enough. He was exalted to heaven in p'int o' privilege, but he took to drink and onstiddy ways in the army, and now here he is in jail. I tell you, I tried to set it home to Eph, when I was a-bringin' on him home in the waggin, but, Lordy massy, we don't none of us like to have our sins set in order afore us. There was David, now, he was crank as could be when he thought Nathan was a-talkin' about other people's sins. Says David, 'The man that did that shall surely die;' but come to set it home, and say, 'Thou art the man,' David caved right in. 'Lordy massy bless your soul and body, Nathan,' says he, 'I don't want to die.'"

It will be seen by these edifying moralizings how eminently Scriptural was the course of Sam's mind. In fact, his turn for long-winded, pious reflection was not the least among his many miscellaneous accomplishments.

As to my grandmother, she busied herself in comforting

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the hearts of Aunt Nancy and the children with more than they could eat of the relics of the Thanksgiving feast, and bidding them not to be down-hearted nor afeard of anything, for the neighbors would all stand up for them, confirming her words with well-known quotations from the Old Testament, to the effect that "the triumphing of the wicked is short," and that "evil-doers shall soon be cut off from the earth."

This incident gave Ellery Davenport a wide-spread popularity in the circles of Oldtown. My grandmother was predisposed to look on him with complacency as a grandson of President Edwards, although he took, apparently, a freakish delight in shocking the respectable prejudices, and disappointing the reasonable expectations, of people in this regard, by assuming in every conversation precisely the sentiments that could have been least expected of him in view of such a paternity. In fact, Ellery Davenport was one of those talkers who delight to maintain the contrary of every proposition started, and who enjoy the bustle and confusion which they thus make in every circle.

In good, earnest, intense New England, where every idea was taken up and sifted with serious solemnity, and investigated with a view to an immediate practical action upon it as true or false, this glittering, fanciful system of fencing which he kept up on all subjects, maintaining with equal brilliancy and ingenuity this to-day and that to-morrow, might possibly have drawn down upon a man a certain horror, as a professed scoffer and a bitter enemy of all that is good; but Ellery Davenport, with all his apparent carelessness, understood himself and the world he moved in perfectly. He never lost sight of the effect he was producing on any mind, and had an intuitive judgment, in every situation, of exactly how far he might go without going too far.

The position of such young men as Ellery Davenport,

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in the theocratic state of society in New England at this time, can be understood only by considering the theologic movements of their period. The colonists who founded Massachusetts were men whose doctrine of a Christian church in regard to the position of its children was essentially the same as that of the Church of England. Thus we find in Doctor Cotton Mather this statement: —

"They did all agree with their brethren at Plymouth in this point: that the children of the faithful were church-members with their parents; and that their baptism was a seal of their being so; only, before their admission to fellowship in any particular church, it was judged necessary that, being free from scandal in life, they should be examined by the elders of the church, upon whose approbation of their fitness they should publicly and personally own the covenant, and so be received unto the table of the Lord. And accordingly the eldest son of Mr. Higginson, being about fifteen years of age, and laudably answering all the characters expected in a communicant, was then so received."

The colony under Governor Winthrop and Thomas Dudley was, in fact, composed of men in all but political opinion warmly attached to the Church of England; and they published, on their departure, a tract called "The Humble Request of His Majesty's Loyal Subjects, the Governor and Company lately gone for New England, for the Obtaining of their Prayers, and the Removal of Suspicions and Misconstruction of their Intentions;" and in this address they called the Church of England their dear mother, acknowledging that such hope and part as they had attained in the common salvation, they had sucked from her breasts; and entreating their many reverend fathers and brethren to recommend them unto the mercies of God, in their constant prayers, as a church now springing out of their own bowels. Originally, therefore, the first young people who grew up

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in New England were taught in their earliest childhood to regard themselves as already members of the church, as under obligations to comport themselves accordingly, and at a very early age it was expected of them that they would come forward by their own act and confirm the action of their parents in their baptism, in a manner much the same in general effect as confirmation in England. The immediate result of this was much sympathy on the part of the children and young people with the religious views of their parents, and a sort of growing up into them from generation to generation. But, as the world is always tending to become unspiritual and mechanical in its views and sentiments, the defect of the species of religion thus engendered was a want of that vitality and warmth of emotion which attend the convert whose mind has come out of darkness into marvelous light, — who has passed through interior conflicts which have agitated his soul to the very depths. So there was always a party in New England who maintained that only those who could relate a change so marked as to be characterized as supernatural should hope that they were the true elect of God, or be received in churches and acknowledged as true Christians.

Many pages of Cotton Mather record the earnest attention which not only the ministers, but the governors and magistrates, of New England, in her early days, gave to the question, "What is the true position of the baptized children of the Church?" and Cotton Mather, who was warmly in favor of the Church of England platform in this respect, says: "It was the study of those prudent men who might be called our seers, that the children of the faithful should be kept, as far as may be, under a church watch, in expectation that they might be in a fairer way to receive the grace of God; so that the prosperous condition of religion in our churches might not be a matter of one age alone."

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Old Cotton waxes warm in arguing this subject, as follows: —

"The Scriptures tell us that men's denying the children of the Church to have any part in the Lord hath a strong tendency in it to make them cease from fearing the Lord, and harden their hearts from his fear. But the awful obligations of covenant interest have a great tendency to soften the heart and break it, and draw it home to God. Hence, when the Lord would powerfully win men to obedience, he often begins with this: that he is their God. The way of the Anabaptists, to admit none unto membership and baptism but adult professors, is the straitest way. One would think it should be a way of great purity, but experience hath shown that it has been an inlet unto great corruption, and a troublesome, dangerous underminer of reformation."

And then old Cotton adds these words, certainly as explicit as even the modern Puseyite could desire: —

"If we do not keep in the way of a converting, grace-giving *covenant*, and keep persons *under those church dispensations wherein grace is given*, the Church will die of a lingering, though not a violent death. The Lord hath not set up churches, only that a few old Christians may keep one another warm while they live and then carry away the Church into the cold grave with them when they die. No; but that they might with all care and with all the obligations and advantages to that care that may be, nurse up another generation of subjects to our Lord, that may stand up in his kingdom when they are one."

It was for some time doubtful whether the New England Church would organize itself and seek its own perpetuation on the educational basis which has been the foundation of the majority of the Christian Church elsewhere; and the question was decided, as such society questions often are, by the vigor and power of one man. Jonathan Edwards,

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a man who united in himself the natures of both a poet and a metaphysician, all whose experiences and feelings were as much more intense than those of common men as Dante's or Milton's, fell into the error of making his own constitutional religious experience the measure and standard of all others, and revolutionizing by it the institutions of the Pilgrim Fathers.

Regeneration, as he taught it in his "Treatise on the Affections," was the implantation by Divine power of a new spiritual sense in the soul, as diverse from all the other senses as seeing is from hearing, or tasting from smelling. No one that had not received this new, divine, supernatural sense, could properly belong to the Church of Christ, and all men, until they did receive it, were naturally and constitutionally enemies of God to such a degree, that, as he says in a sermon to that effect, "If they had God in their power, they would kill him."

It was his power and his influence which succeeded in completely upsetting New England from the basis on which the Reformers and the Puritan Fathers had placed her, and casting out of the Church the children of the very saints and martyrs, who had come to this country for no other reason than to found a church.

It is remarkable that, in all the discussions of depravity inherited from Adam, it never seemed to occur to any theologian that there might also be a counter-working of the great law of descent, by which the feelings and habits of thought wrought in the human mind by Jesus Christ might descend through generations of Christians, so that, in course of time, many might be born predisposed to good, rather than to evil. Cotton Mather fearlessly says that "*the seed of the Church are born holy,*" — not, of course, meaning it in strictly theological sense, but certainly indicating that, in his day, a mild and genial spirit of hope breathed over the cradle of infancy and childhood.

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Those very persons whom President Edwards addresses in such merciless terms of denunciation in his sermons, telling them that it is a wonder the sun does not refuse to shine upon them, — that the earth daily groans to open under them, — and that the wind and the sun and the waters are all weary of them and longing to break forth and execute the wrath of God upon them, — were the children for uncounted generations back of fathers and mothers nursed in the bosom of the Church, trained in habits of daily prayer, brought up to patience and self-sacrifice and self-denial as the very bread of their daily being, and lacking only this supernatural sixth sense, the want of which brought upon them a guilt so tremendous. The consequence was, that, immediately after the time of President Edwards, there grew up in the very bosom of the New England Church a set of young people who were not merely indifferent to religion, but who hated it with the whole energy of their being.

Ellery Davenport's feeling toward the Church and religion had all the bitterness of the disinherited son, who likes nothing better than to point out the faults in those favored children who enjoy the privileges of which he is deprived. All the consequences that good, motherly Cotton Mather had foreseen as likely to result from the proposed system of arranging the Church were strikingly verified in his case. He had not been able entirely to rid himself of a belief in what he hated. The danger of all such violent recoils from the religion of one's childhood consists in this fact, — that the person is always secretly uncertain that he may not be opposing truth and virtue itself; he struggles confusedly with the faith of his mother, the prayers of his father, with whatever there may be holy and noble in the profession of that faith from which he has broken away; and few escape a very serious shock to conscience and their moral nature in doing it.

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Ellery Davenport was at war with himself, at war with the traditions of his ancestry, and had the feeling that he was regarded in the Puritan community as an apostate; but he took a perverse pleasure in making his position good by a brilliancy of wit and grace of manner which few could resist; and, truth to say, his success, even with the more rigid, justified his self-confidence. As during these days there were very few young persons who made any profession of religion at all, the latitude of expression which he allowed himself on these subjects was looked upon as a sort of spiritual sowing of wild oats. Heads would be gravely shaken over him. One and another would say, "Ah! that Edwards blood is smart; it runs pretty wild in youth, but the Lord's time may come by and by;" and I doubt not that my grandmother that very night, before she slept, wrestled with God in prayer for his soul with all the enthusiasm of a Monica for a St. Augustine.

Meantime, with that easy facility which enabled him to please everybody, he became, during the course of a somewhat extended visit which he made at the minister's, rather a hero in Oldtown. What Colonel Davenport said, and what Colonel Davenport did, were spoken of from mouth to mouth. Even his wicked wit was repeated by the gravest and most pious, — of course with some expressions of disclaimer, but, after all, with that genuine pleasure which a Yankee never fails to feel in anything smartly and neatly hit off in language.

He cultivated a great friendship with Miss Mehitable, — talking with her of books and literature and foreign countries, and advising her in regard to the education of Tina, with great unction and gravity. With that little princess there was always a sort of half whimsical flirtation, as she demurely insisted on being treated by him as a woman, rather than as a child, — a caprice which amused him greatly.

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Miss Mehitable felt herself irresistibly drawn, in his society, as almost everybody else was, to make a confidant of him. He was so winning, so obliging, so gentle, and knew so well just where and how to turn the conversation to avoid anything that he did n't like to hear, and to hear anything that he did. So gently did his fingers run over the gamut of everybody's nature, that nobody dreamed of being played on. Such men are not, of course, villains; but, if they ever should happen to wish to become so, their nature gives them every facility.

Before she knew what she was about, Miss Mehitable found herself talking with Ellery Davenport on the strange, mysterious sorrow which imbittered her life, and she found a most sympathetic and respectful listener.

Ellery Davenport was already versed in diplomatic life, and had held for a year or two a situation of importance at the court of France; was soon to return thither, and also to be employed on diplomatic service in England. Could he, would he, find any traces of the lost one there? On this subject there were long, and, on the part of Miss Mehitable, agitating interviews, which much excited Miss Tina's curiosity.

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CHAPTER XIX

MY GRANDMOTHER'S BLUE BOOK

READER, this is to be a serious chapter, and I advise all those people who want to go through the world without giving five minutes' consecutive thought to any subject to skip it. They will not find it entertaining, and it may perhaps lead them to think on puzzling subjects, even for so long a time as half an hour; and who knows what may happen to their brains, from so unusual an exercise?

My grandmother, as I have shown, was a character in her way, full of contradictions and inconsistencies, brave, generous, energetic, large-hearted, and impulsive. Theoretically she was an ardent disciple of the sharpest and severest Calvinism, and used to repeat Michael Wigglesworth's "Day of Doom" to us in the chimney-corner, of an evening, with a reverent acquiescence in all its hard sayings, while practically she was the most pitiful, easy-to-be-entreated old mortal on earth, and was ever falling a prey to any lazy vagabond who chose to make an appeal to her abounding charity. She could not refuse a beggar that asked in a piteous tone; she could not send a child to bed that wanted to sit up; she could not eat a meal in peace when there were hungry eyes watching her; she could not, in cool, deliberate moments, even inflict transient and necessary pain for the greater good of a child, and resolutely shut her eyes to the necessity of such infliction. But there lay at the bottom of all this apparent inconsistency a deep cause that made it consistent, and that cause was the theologic stratum in which her mind, and the mind of all New England, was embedded.

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Never, in the most intensely religious ages of the world, did the insoluble problem of the WHENCE, the WHY, and the WHITHER of mankind receive such earnest attention. New England was founded by a colony who turned their backs on the civilization of the Old World, on purpose that they might have nothing else to think of. Their object was to form a community that should think of nothing else.

Working on a hard soil, battling with a harsh, ungenial climate, everywhere being treated by Nature with the most rigorous severity, they asked no indulgence, they got none, and they gave none. They shut out from their religious worship every poetic drapery, every physical accessory that they feared would interfere with the abstract contemplation of hard, naked truth, and set themselves grimly and determinately to study the severest problems of the unknowable and the insoluble. Just as resolutely as they made their farms by blasting rocks and clearing land of ledges of stone, and founded thrifty cities and thriving money-getting communities in places which one would think might more properly have been left to the white bears, so resolutely they pursued their investigations amid the grim mysteries of human existence, determined to see and touch and handle everything for themselves, and to get at the absolute truth if absolute truth could be got at.

They never expected to find truth agreeable. Nothing in their experience of life had ever prepared them to think it would be so. Their investigations were made with the courage of the man who hopes little, but determines to know the worst of his affairs. They wanted no smoke of incense to blind them, and no soft opiates of pictures and music to lull them; for what they were after was truth, and not happiness, and they valued duty far higher than enjoyment.

The underlying foundation of life, therefore, in New England, was one of profound, unutterable, and therefore

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unuttered melancholy, which regarded human existence itself as a ghastly risk, and, in the case of the vast majority of human beings, an inconceivable misfortune.

My grandmother believed in statements which made the fortunate number who escaped the great catastrophe of mortal life as few and far between as the shivering, half-drowned mariners, who crawl up on to the shores of some desert island, when all else on board have perished. In this view she regarded the birth of an infant with a suppressed groan, and the death of one almost with satisfaction. That more than half the human race die in infancy, — that infanticide is the general custom in so many heathen lands, — was to her a comforting consideration, for so many were held to escape at once the awful ordeal, and to be gathered into the numbers of the elect.

As I have said, she was a great reader. On the round table that stood in her bedroom, next to the kitchen, there was an ample supply of books. Rollin's Ancient History, Hume's History of England, and President Edwards's Sermons, were among these.

She was not one of those systematic, skillful housewives who contrive with few steps and great method to do much in little time; she took everything the hardest end first, and attacked difficulties by sheer inconsiderate strength. For example, instead of putting on the great family pot, filling it with water, and afterwards putting therein the beef, pork, and vegetables of our daily meal, she would load up the receptacle at the sink in the back room, and then, with strong arm and cap-border erect, would fly across the kitchen with it and swing it over the fire by main strength. Thus inconsiderately she rushed at the daily battle of existence. But there was one point of system in which she never failed. There was, every day, a period, sacred and inviolable, which she gave to reading. The noon meal came exactly at twelve o'clock; and immediately

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after, when the dishes were washed and wiped, and the kitchen reduced to order, my grandmother changed her gown, and retired to the sanctuary of her bedroom to read. In this way she accomplished an amount which a modern housekeeper, with four servants, would pronounce to be wholly incredible.

The books on her table came in time to be my reading as well as hers; for, as I have said, reading was with me a passion, a hunger, and I read all that came in my way.

Her favorite books had different-colored covers, thriftily put on to preserve them from the wear of handling; and it was by these covers they were generally designated in the family. Hume's History of England was known as "the brown book;" Rollin's History was "the green book;" but there was one volume which she pondered oftener and with more intense earnestness than any other, which received the designation of "the blue book." This was a volume by the Rev. Dr. Bellamy of Connecticut, called "True Religion delineated, and distinguished from all Counterfeits." It was originally published by subscription, and sent out into New England with a letter of introduction and recommendation from the Rev. Jonathan Edwards, who earnestly set it forth as being a condensed summary, in popular language, of what it is vital and important for human beings to know for their spiritual progress. It was written in a strong, nervous, condensed, popular style, such as is fallen into by a practical man speaking to a practical people, by a man thoroughly in earnest to men as deeply in earnest, and lastly, by a man who believed without the shadow of a doubt, and without even the comprehension of the possibility of a doubt.

I cannot give a better idea of the unflinching manner in which the deepest mysteries of religion were propounded to the common people than by giving a specimen of some of the headings of this book.

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Page 288 considers, "Were we by the Fall brought into a State of Being worse than Not to Be?"

The answer to this comprehensive question is sufficiently explicit.

"Mankind were by their fall brought into a state of being worse than not to be. The damned in hell, no doubt, are in such a state, else their punishment would not be infinite, as justice requires it should be. But mankind, by the fall, were brought into a state, *for substance*, as bad as that which the damned are in."

The next inquiry to this is, "How could God, consistent with his perfections, put us into a state of being worse than not to be? And how can we ever thank God for such a being?"

The answer to this, as it was read by thousands of reflecting minds like mine, certainly shows that these hardy and courageous investigators often raised spirits that they could not lay. As, for instance, this solution of the question, which never struck me as satisfactory.

"Inasmuch as God did virtually give being to all mankind, when he blessed our first parents and said, 'Be fruitful and multiply;' and inasmuch as *Being*, under the circumstances that man was *then* put in by God, was very desirable: we ought, therefore, to thank God for our being considered in this light, and justify God for all the evil that has come upon us by apostasy."

On this subject the author goes on to moralize thus: —

"Mankind, by the fall, were brought into a state of being infinitely worse than not to be: and were they but so far awake as to be sensible of it, they would, no doubt, all over the earth, murmur and blaspheme the God of Heaven. But what then? there would be no just ground for such conduct. We have no reason to think hard of God, — to blame him or esteem him e'er the less. What he has done was fit and right. His conduct was beautiful,

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and he is worthy to be esteemed for it. For that constitution was holy, just, and good, as has been proved. And, therefore, a fallen world ought to ascribe to themselves all the evil, and to justify God and say: 'God gave us being under a constitution holy, just, and good, and it was a mercy. We should have accounted it a great mercy in case Adam had never fallen; but God is not to blame for this, nor, therefore, is he the less worthy of thanks.'"

After this comes another and quite practical inquiry, which is stated as follows: —

"But if mankind are thus by nature children of wrath, in a state of being worse than not to be, how can men have the heart to propagate their kind?"

The answer to this inquiry it is not necessary to give at length. I merely state it to show how unblinking was the gaze which men in those days fixed upon the problems of life.

The objector is still further represented as saying, —

"It cannot be thought a blessing to have children, if most of them are thought to be likely to perish."

The answer to this is as follows: —

"The most of Abraham's posterity for these three thousand years, no doubt, have been wicked and perished. And God knew beforehand how it would be, and yet he promised such a numerous posterity under the notion of a great blessing. For, considering children as to this life, they may be a great blessing and comfort to their parents; and we are certain that God will do them no wrong in the life to come. All men's murmuring thoughts about this matter arise from their not liking God's way of governing the world."

I will quote but one more passage, as showing the hardy vigor of assertion on the darkest of subjects, — the origin of evil. The author says: —

"When God first designed the world, and laid out his

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scheme of government, it was easy for him to have determined that neither angels nor men should ever sin, and that misery should never be heard of in all his dominions; for he could easily have prevented both sin and misery. Why did not he? Surely not for want of goodness in his nature, for that is infinite; not from anything like cruelty, for there is no such thing in him; not for want of a suitable regard to the happiness of his creatures, for that he always has: but because in his infinite wisdom he did not think it best on the whole.

"But why was it not best? What could he have in view preferable to the happiness of his creatures? And, if their happiness was to him above all things most dear, how could he bear the thoughts of their ever any of them being miserable?

"It is certain that he had in view something else than merely the happiness of his creatures. It was something of greater importance. But what was that thing that was of greater worth and importance, and to which he had the greatest regard, making all other things give way to this? What was his great end in creating and governing the world? Why, look what end he is at last likely to obtain, when the whole scheme is finished, and the Day of Judgment passed, and heaven and hell filled with all their proper inhabitants. What will be the final result? What will he get by all? Why, this: that he will exert and display every one of his perfections to the life, and so by all will exhibit a most perfect and exact image of himself.

"Now it is evident that the fall of angels and of man, together with all those things which have and will come to pass in consequence thereof, from the beginning of the world to the Day of Judgment and throughout eternity, will serve to give a much more lively and perfect representation of God than could possibly have been given had there been no sin or misery."

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This book also led the inquirer through all the mazes of mental philosophy, and discussed all the problems of mystical religion, such as, —

"Can a man, merely from self-love, love God more than himself?"

"Is our impotency only moral?"

"What is the most fundamental difference between Arminians and Calvinists?"

"How the love to our neighbor which is commanded by God is a thing different from natural compassion, from natural affection, from party-spirited love, from any love whatever that arises merely from self-love, and from the love which enthusiasts and heretics have for one another."

I give these specimens, that the reader may reflect what kind of population there was likely to be where such were the daily studies of a plain country farmer's wife, and such the common topics discussed at every kitchen fireside.

My grandmother's blue book was published and recommended to the attention of New England, August 4, 1750, just twenty-six years before the Declaration of Independence. How popular it was, and how widely read in New England, appears from the list of subscribers which stands at the end of the old copy which my grandmother actually used. Almost every good old Massachusetts or Connecticut family name is there represented. We have the Emersons, the Adamses, the Brattles of Brattle Street, the Bromfields of Bromfield Street, the Brinsmaids of Connecticut, the Butlers, the Campbells, the Chapmans, the Cottons, the Daggetts, the Hawleys, the Hookers, with many more names of families yet continuing to hold influence in New England. How they regarded this book may be inferred from the fact that some subscribed for six books, some for twelve, some for thirty-six, and some for fifty. Its dissemination was deemed an act of religious ministry, and there is not the slightest doubt that it was heedfully

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and earnestly read in every good family of New England; and its propositions were discussed everywhere and by everybody. This is one undoubted fact; the other is, that it was this generation who fought through the Revolutionary war. They were a set of men and women brought up to *think*, — to think not merely on agreeable subjects, but to wrestle and tug at the very severest problems. Utter self-renunciation, a sort of grand contempt for personal happiness when weighed with things greater and more valuable, was the fundamental principle of life in those days. They who could calmly look in the face, and settle themselves down to, the idea of being resigned and thankful for an existence which was not so good as non-existence, — who were willing to be loyal subjects of a splendid and powerful government which was conducted on quite other issues than a regard for their happiness, — were possessed of a courage and a fortitude which no mere earthly mischance could shake. They who had faced eternal ruin with an unflinching gaze were not likely to shrink before the comparatively trivial losses and gains of any mere earthly conflict. Being accustomed to combats with the Devil, it was rather a recreation to fight only British officers.

If any should ever be so curious as to read this old treatise, as well as most of the writings of Jonathan Edwards, they will perceive with singular plainness how inevitably monarchical and aristocratic institutions influence theology.

That "the king can do no wrong," — that the subject owes everything to the king, and the king nothing to the subject, — that it is the king's first duty to take care of himself, and keep up state, splendor, majesty, and royalty, and that it is the people's duty to give themselves up, body and soul, without a murmuring thought, to keep up this state, splendor, and royalty, — were ideas for ages so wrought into the human mind, and transmitted by ordinary generation, — they so reflected themselves in literature and

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poetry and art, and all the great customs of society, — that it was inevitable that systematic theology should be permeated by them.

The idea of God in which theologians delighted, and which the popular mind accepted, was not that of the Good Shepherd that giveth his life for the sheep, — of him that made himself of no reputation, and took unto himself the form of a servant, — of him who on his knees washed the feet of his disciples, and said that in the kingdom of heaven the greatest was he who served most humbly, — this aspect of a Divine Being had not yet been wrought into their systematic theology; because, while the Bible comes from God, theology is the outgrowth of the human mind, and therefore must spring from the movement of society.

When the Puritans arrived at a perception of the political rights of men in the state, and began to enunciate and act upon the doctrine that a king's right to reign was founded upon his power to promote the greatest happiness of his subjects, and when, in pursuance of this theory, they tried, condemned, and executed a king who had been false to the people, they took a long step forward in human progress. Why did not immediate anarchy follow, as when the French took such a step in regard to their king? It was because the Puritans transferred to God all those rights and immunities, all that unquestioning homage and worship and loyalty, which hitherto they had given to an earthly king.

The human mind cannot bear to relinquish more than a certain portion of its cherished past ideas in one century. Society falls into anarchy in too entire a change of base.

The Puritans had still a King. The French Revolutionists had nothing; therefore, the Puritan Revolution went on stronger and stronger. The French passed through anarchy back under despotism.

The doctrine of Divine sovereignty was the great rest to

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the human mind in those days, when the foundations of many generations were broken up. It is always painful to honest and loyal minds to break away from that which they have reverenced, to put down that which they have respected. And the Puritans were by nature the most reverential and most loyal portion of the community. Their passionate attachment to the doctrine of Divine sovereignty, at this period, was the pleading and yearning within them of a faculty robbed of its appropriate object, and longing for support and expression.

There is something most affecting in the submissive devotion of these old Puritans to their God. Nothing shows more completely the indestructible nature of the filial tie which binds man to God, of the filial yearning which throbs in the heart of a great child of so great a Father, than the manner in which these men loved and worshiped and trusted God as the ALL LOVELY, even in the face of monstrous assertions of theology ascribing to him deeds which no father could imitate with being cast out of human society, and no governor without being handed down to all ages as a monster.

These theologies were not formed by the Puritans; they were their legacy from past monarchical and mediæval ages; and the principles of true Christian democracy upon which they founded their new state began, from the time of the American Revolution, to act upon them with a constantly ameliorating power; so that whosoever should read my grandmother's blue book now would be astonished to find how completely New England theology has changed its base.

The artist, in reproducing pictures of New England life during this period, is often obliged to hold his hand. He could not faithfully report the familiar conversations of the common people, because they often allude to and discuss the most awful and tremendous subjects. This, however,

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was the inevitable result of the honest, fearless manner in which the New England ministry of this second era discussed the Divine administration. They argued for it with the common people in very much the tone and with much the language in which they defended the Continental Congress and the ruling President; and every human being was addressed as a competent judge.

The result of such a mode of proceeding, in the long run, changed the theology of New England, from what it was when Jonathan Edwards recommended my grandmother's blue book, into what it is at this present writing. But, during the process of this investigation, every child born in New England found himself beaten backwards and forwards, like a shuttlecock, between the battledoors of discussion. Our kitchen used to be shaken constantly by what my grandfather significantly called "the battle of the Infinites," especially when my Uncle Bill came home from Cambridge on his vacations, fully charged with syllogisms, which he hurled like catapults back on the syllogisms which my grandmother had drawn from the armory of her blue book.

My grandmother would say, for example: "Whatever sin is committed against an infinite being is an infinite evil. Every infinite evil deserves infinite punishment; therefore every sin of man deserves an infinite punishment."

Then Uncle Bill, on the other side, would say: "No act of a finite being can be infinite. Man is a finite being; therefore no sin of man can be infinite. No finite evil deserves infinite punishment. Man's sins are finite evils; therefore man's sins do not deserve infinite punishment." When the combatants had got thus far, they generally looked at each other in silence.

As a result, my grandmother being earnest and prayerful, and my uncle careless and worldly, the thing generally

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ended in her believing that he was wrong, though she could not answer him; and in his believing that she, after all, might be right, though he could answer her; for it is noticeable, in every battle of opinion, that honest, sincere, moral earnestness has a certain advantage over mere intellectual cleverness.

It was inevitable that a people who had just carried through a national revolution and declared national independence on the principle that "governments owe their just power to the consent of the governed," and who recognized it as an axiom that the greatest good to the greatest number was the object to be held in view in all just governments, should very soon come into painful collision with forms of theological statement, in regard to God's government, which appeared to contravene all these principles, and which could be supported only by referring to the old notion of the Divine right and prerogative of the King Eternal.

President Edwards had constructed a marvelous piece of logic to show that, while true virtue in man consisted in supreme devotion to the general good of all, true virtue in God consisted in supreme regard for himself. This "Treatise on True Virtue" was one of the strongest attempts to back up by reasoning the old monarchical and aristocratic ideas of the supreme right of the king and upper classes. The whole of it falls to dust before the one simple declaration of Jesus Christ, that, in the eyes of Heaven, one lost sheep is more prized than all the ninety and nine that went not astray, and before the parable in which the father runs, forgetful of parental prerogative and dignity, to cast himself on the neck of the far-off prodigal. Theology being human and a reflection of human infirmities, nothing is more common than for it to come up point-blank in opposition to the simplest declarations of Christ.

I must beg my readers' pardon for all this, but it is a fact that the true tragedy of New England life, its deep,

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unutterable pathos, its endurances and its sufferings, all depended upon, and were woven into, this constant wrestling of thought with infinite problems which could not be avoided, and which saddened the days of almost every one who grew up under it.

Was this entire freedom of thought and discussion a bad thing, then? Do we not see that strength of mind and strength of will, and the courage and fortitude and endurance which founded this great American government, grew up out of characters formed thus to think and struggle and suffer? It seems to be the law of this present existence, that all the changes by which the world is made better are brought about by the struggle and suffering, and sometimes the utter shipwreck, of individual human beings.

In regard to our own family, the deepest tragedy in it, and the one which for a time brought the most suffering and sorrow on us all, cannot be explained unless we take into consideration this peculiar state of society.

In the neighboring town of Adams there lived one of the most remarkable clergymen that New England has ever produced. His career influenced the thinking of Massachusetts, both in regard to those who adopted his opinions, and in the violent reaction from those opinions which was the result of his extreme manner of pushing them.

Dr. Moses Stern's figure is well remembered by me as I saw it in my boyhood. Everybody knew him, and when he appeared in the pulpit everybody trembled before him. He moved among men, but seemed not of men. An austere, inflexible, grand indifference to all things earthly seemed to give him the prestige and dignity of a supernatural being. His Calvinism was of so severe and ultra a type, and his statements were so little qualified either by pity of human infirmity, or fear of human censure, or desire of human approbation, that he reminded one of some ancient prophet, freighted with a mission of woe and wrath,

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which he must always speak, whether people would hear or whether they would forbear.

The Revolutionary war had introduced into the country a great deal of skepticism, of a type of which Paine's "Age of Reason" was an exponent; and, to meet this, the ministry of New England was not slow or unskillful. Dr. Stern's mode of meeting this attitude of the popular mind was by an unflinching, authoritative, vehement reiteration of all the most unpopular and unpleasant points of Calvinism. Now as Nature is, in many of her obvious aspects, notoriously uncompromising, harsh, and severe, the Calvinist who begins to talk to common-sense people has this advantage on his side, — that the things which he represents the Author of Nature as doing and being ready to do are not very different from what the common-sense man sees that the Author of Nature is already in the habit of doing.

The farmer who struggles with the hard soil, and with drouth and frost and caterpillars and fifty other insect plagues, — who finds his most persistent and well-calculated efforts constantly thwarted by laws whose workings he never can fully anticipate, and which never manifest either care for his good intentions or sympathy for his losses, is very apt to believe that the God who created nature may be a generally benevolent, but a severe and unsympathetic being, governing the world for some great, unknown purpose of his own, of which man's private improvement and happiness may or may not form a part.

Dr. Stern, with characteristic independence and fearlessness, on his own simple authority cut loose from and repudiated the whole traditional idea of the fall in Adam as having anything to do with the existence of human depravity; and made up his own theory of the universe, and began preaching it to the farmers of Adams. It was simply this: that the Divine Being is the efficient cause of all

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things, not only in matter but in mind, — that every good and every evil volition of any being in the universe is immediately caused by Him and tends equally well in its way to carry on his great designs. But, in order that this might not interfere with the doctrines of human responsibility, he taught that all was accomplished by Omniscient skill and knowledge in such a way as not in the slightest degree to interfere with human free agency; so that the whole responsibility of every human being's actions must rest upon himself.

Thus was this system calculated, like a skillful engine of torture, to produce all the mental anguish of the most perfect sense of helplessness with the most torturing sense of responsibility. Alternately he worked these two great levers with an almost supernatural power, — on one Sunday demonstrating with the most logical clearness, and by appeals to human consciousness, the perfect freedom of man, and, on the next, demonstrating with no less precision and logic the perfect power which an Omniscient Being possessed and exercised of controlling all his thoughts and volitions and actions.

Individually, Dr. Stern, like many other teachers of severe, uncompromising theories, was an artless, simple-hearted, gentle-mannered man. He was a close student, and wore two holes in the floor opposite his table in the spot where year after year his feet were placed in study. He refused to have the smallest thing to do with any temporal affair of this life. Like the other clergymen, he lived on a small salary, and the support of his family depended largely on the proceeds of a farm. But it is recorded of him, that once, when his whole summer's crop of hay was threatened with the bursting of a thunder-shower, and, farm-hands being short, he was importuned to lend a hand to save it, he resolutely declined, saying, that, if he once began to allow himself to be called on in

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any emergency for temporal affairs, he should become forgetful of his great mission.

The same inflexible, unbending perseverance he showed in preaching, on the basis of his own terrible theory, the most fearful doctrines of Calvinism. His sermons on Judas, on Jeroboam, and on Pharaoh, as practical examples of the doctrine of reprobation, were pieces of literature so startling and astounding, that, even in those days of interrupted travel, when there were neither railroads nor good roads of any kind, and almost none of our modern communicative system of magazines and newspapers, they were heard of all over New England. So great was the revulsion which his doctrines excited, that, when he exchanged with his other ministers, his appearance in the pulpit was the signal for some of the most independent of the congregation to get up and leave the meeting-house. But, as it was one of his maxims that the minister who does not excite the opposition of the natural heart fails to do his work, he regarded such demonstrations as evident signs of a faithful ministry.

The science of Biblical criticism in his day was in its infancy; the Bible was mostly read by ministers, and proof-texts quoted from it as if it had been a treatise written in the English language by New Englanders, and in which every word must bear the exact sense of a New England metaphysical treatise. And thus interpreting the whole wide labyrinth of poetry and history, and Oriental allegory and hyperbole, by literal rules, Dr. Stern found no difficulty in making it clear to those who heard him that there was no choice between believing his hard doctrines and giving up the Bible altogether. And it shows the deep and rooted attachment which the human heart has for that motherly book, that even in this dreadful dilemma the majority of his hearers did not revolt from the Bible.

As it was, in the town where he lived his preaching

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formed the strongest, most controlling of all forces. No human being could hear his sermons unmoved. He would not preach to an inattentive audience, and on one occasion, observing a large number of his congregation asleep, he abruptly descended from the pulpit and calmly walked off home, leaving the astonished congregation to their own reflections; nor would he resume public services until messages of contrition and assurances of better conduct had been sent him.

Dr. Stern was in his position irresistible, simply because he cared nothing at all for the things which men ordinarily care for, and which therefore could be used as motives to restrain the declarations and actions of a clergyman. He cared nothing about worldly prosperity; he was totally indifferent to money; he utterly despised fame and reputation, and therefore from none of these sources could he be in the slightest degree influenced. Such a man is generally the king of his neighborhood, — the one whom all look up to, and all fear, and whose word in time becomes law.

Dr. Stern never sought to put himself forward otherwise than by the steady preaching of his system to the farming population of Adams. And yet, so great were his influence and his fame, that in time it became customary for young theological students to come and settle themselves down there as his students. This was done at first without his desire, and contrary to his remonstrance. "I can't engage to teach you," he said; but still, when scholars came and continued to come, he found himself, without seeking it, actually at the head of a school of theology.

Let justice be done to all; it is due to truth to state that the theological scholars of Dr. Stern, wherever they went in the United States, were always marked men, — marked for an unflinching adherence to principle, and especially for a great power in supporting unpopular truths.

The Doctor himself lived to an extreme old age, always

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retaining and reiterating with unflinching constancy his opinions. He was the last of the New England ministers who preserved the old clerical dress of the theocracy. Long after the cocked hat and small-clothes, silk stockings and shoe-buckles, had ceased to appear in modern life, his venerable figure, thus appareled, walked the ways of modern men, seeming like one of the primitive Puritans risen from the dead.

He was the last, also, of the New England ministers to claim for himself that peculiar position, as God's ambassador, which was such a reality in the minds of the whole early Puritan community. To extreme old age, his word was law in his parish, and he calmly and positively felt that it should be so. In time, his gray hairs, his fine, antique figure and quaint costume came to be regarded with the sort of appreciative veneration that every one gives to the monuments of the past. When he was near his ninetieth year, he was invited to New York to give the prestige of his venerable presence to the religious anniversaries which then were in the flush of newly organized enthusiasm, and which gladly laid hold of this striking accessory to the religious picturesque.

Dr. Stern was invited and fêted in the most select upper circles of New York, and treated with attentions which would have been flattering had he not been too entirely simple-minded and careless of such matters even to perceive what they meant.

But at this same time the Abolitionists, who were regarded as most improper people to be recognized in the religious circles of good society, came to New York, resolving to have their anniversary also; and, knowing that Dr. Stern had always professed to be an anti-slavery man, they invited him to sit on the stage with them; and Dr. Stern went. Shocking to relate, and dreadful to behold, this very cocked hat and these picturesque gray hairs, that had

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been brought to New York on purpose to ornament religious anniversaries which were all agreed in excluding and ignoring the Abolitionists, had gone right over into the camp of the enemy! and he was so entirely ignorant and uninstructible on the subject, and came back, after having committed this abomination, with a face of such innocent and serene gravity, that nobody dared to say a word to him on the subject.

He was at this time the accepted guest in a family whose very religion consisted in a gracious carefulness and tenderness lest they should wake up the feelings of their Southern brethren on the delicate subject of slavery. But then Dr. Stern was a man that it did no good to talk to, since it was well known that, wherever there was an unpopular truth to be defended, his cocked hat was sure to be in the front ranks.

Let us do one more justice to Dr. Stern, and say that his utter inflexibility toward human infirmity and human feeling spared himself as little as it spared any other. In his early life he records, in a most affecting autobiography, the stroke which deprived him, within a very short space, of a beloved wife and two charming children. In the struggle of that hour he says, with affecting simplicity, "I felt that I should die if I did not submit; and I did submit then, once for all." Thenceforward the beginning and middle and end of his whole preaching was submission, — utter, absolute, and unconditional.

In extreme old age, trembling on the verge of the grave, and looking back over sixty years of intense labor, he said, "After all, it is quite possible that *I* may not be saved;" but he considered himself as but one drop in the ocean, and his personal salvation as of but secondary account. His devotion to the King Eternal had no reference to a matter so slight. In all this, if there is something terrible and painful, there is something also which is grand, and in

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which we can take pride, as the fruit of our human nature. Peace to his ashes! he has learned better things ere now.

If my readers would properly understand the real depth of sorrowful perplexity in which our friend Miss Mehitable Rossiter was struggling, they must go back with us some years before, to the time when little Emily Rossiter was given up to the guardianship and entire control of her Aunt Farnsworth.

Zedekiah Farnsworth was one of those men who embody qualities which the world could not afford to be without, and which yet are far from being the most agreeable. Uncompromising firmness, intense self-reliance, with great vigor in that part of the animal nature which fits man to resist and to subdue and to hold in subjection the forces of nature, were his prominent characteristics. His was a bold and granite formation, — most necessary for the stability of the earth, but without a flower.

His wife was a woman who had once been gay and beautiful, but who, coming under the dominion of a stronger nature, was perfectly magnetized by it, so as to assimilate and become a modified reproduction of the same traits. A calm, intense, severe conscientiousness, which judged alike herself and others with unflinching severity, was her leading characteristic.

Let us now imagine a child inheriting from the mother a sensitive, nervous organization, and from the father a predisposition to morbid action, with a mind as sensitive to external influence as a daguerreotype-plate, brought suddenly from the warmth of a too indulgent household to the arctic regularity and frozen stillness of the Farnsworth mansion. It will be seen that the consequences must have been many conflicts, and many struggles of nature with nature, and that a character growing up thus must of course grow up into unnatural and unhealthy development.

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The problem of education is seriously complicated by the peculiarities of womanhood. If we suppose two souls, exactly alike, sent into bodies, the one of man, the other of woman, that mere fact alone alters the whole mental and moral history of the two.

In addition to all the other sources of peril which beset the little Emily, she early developed a beauty so remarkable as to draw upon her constant attention, and, as she grew older, brought to her all the trials and the dangers which extraordinary beauty brings to woman. It was a part of her Aunt Farnsworth's system to pretend to be ignorant of this great fact, with a view, as she supposed, of checking any disposition to pride or vanity which might naturally arise therefrom. The consequence was that the child, hearing this agreeable news from every one else who surrounded her, soon learned the transparent nature of the hoax, and with it acquired a certain doubt of her aunt's sincerity.

Emily had a warm, social nature, and had always on hand during her school days a list of enthusiastic friends whose admiration of her supplied the light and warmth which were entirely wanting from every other source.

Mrs. Farnsworth was not insensible to the charms of her niece. She was, in fact, quite proud of them, but was pursuing conscientiously the course in regard to them which she felt that duty required of her. She loved the child, too, devotedly, but her own nature had been so thoroughly frozen, by maxims of self-restraint, that this love seldom or never came into outward forms of expression.

It is sad to be compelled to trace the ill effects produced by the overaction and misapplication of the very noblest faculties of the human mind.

The Farnsworth family was one in which there was the fullest sympathy with the severest preaching of Dr. Stern. As Emily grew older, it was exacted of her, as one of her

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Sabbath duties, to take notes of his discourses at church, which were afterwards to be read over on Sunday evening by her aunt and uncle, and preserved in an extract-book.

The effect of such kinds of religious teaching on most of the children and young people in the town of Adams was to make them consider religion, and everything connected with it, as the most disagreeable of all subjects, and to seek practically to have as little to do with it as possible; so that there was among the young people a great deal of youthful gayety and of young enjoyment in life, notwithstanding the preaching from Sunday to Sunday of assertions enough to freeze every heart with fear. Many formed the habit of thinking of something else during the sermon-time, and many heard without really attaching any very definite meaning to what they heard. The severest utterances, if constantly reiterated, lose their power and come to be considered as nothing. But Emily Rossiter had been gifted with a mind of far more than ordinary vigor, and with even a Greek passion for ideas, and with capabilities for logical thought which rendered it impossible for her to listen to discourses so intellectual without taking in their drift and responding to their stimulus by a corresponding intellectual activity.

Dr. Stern set the example of a perfectly bold and independent manner of differing from the popular theology of his day in certain important respects; and, where he did differ, it was with a hardihood of self-assertion, and an utter disregard of popular opinion, and a perfect reliance on his own powers of discovering truth, which were very apt to magnetize these same qualities in other minds. People who thus set the example of free and independent thinking in one or two respects, and yet hope to constrain their disciples to think exactly as they do on all other subjects, generally reckon without their host; and there is no other region in Massachusetts where all sorts of hardy

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freethinking are so rife at the present day as in the region formerly controlled by Dr. Stern.

Before Emily was fourteen years old she had passed through two or three of those seasons of convulsed and agonized feeling which are caused by the revolt of a strong sense of justice and humanity against teachings which seem to accuse the great Father of all of the most frightful cruelty and injustice. The teachings were backed up by literal quotations from the Bible, which in those days no common person possessed the means, or the habits of thought, for understanding, and thus were accepted by her at first as Divine declarations.

When these agonized conflicts occurred, they were treated by her aunt and uncle only as active developments of the natural opposition of the human heart to God. Some such period of active contest with the Divine nature was on record in the lives of some of the most eminent New England saints. President Edwards recorded the same; and therefore they looked upon them hopefully, just as the medical faculty of those same uninstructed times looked upon the writhings and agonies which their administration of poison produced in the human body. The last and most fearful of these mental struggles came after the death of her favorite brother Theodore; who, being supposed to die in an unregenerate state, was forthwith judged and sentenced, and his final condition spoken of with a grim and solemn certainty, by her aunt and uncle.

How far the preaching of Dr. Stern did violence to the most cherished feelings of human nature on this subject will appear by an extract from a sermon preached about this time. The text was from Rev. xix. 3: "And again they said Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever."

The subject is thus announced: —

"The heavenly hosts will praise God for punishing the finally impenitent forever."

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